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THE NEW YORKER

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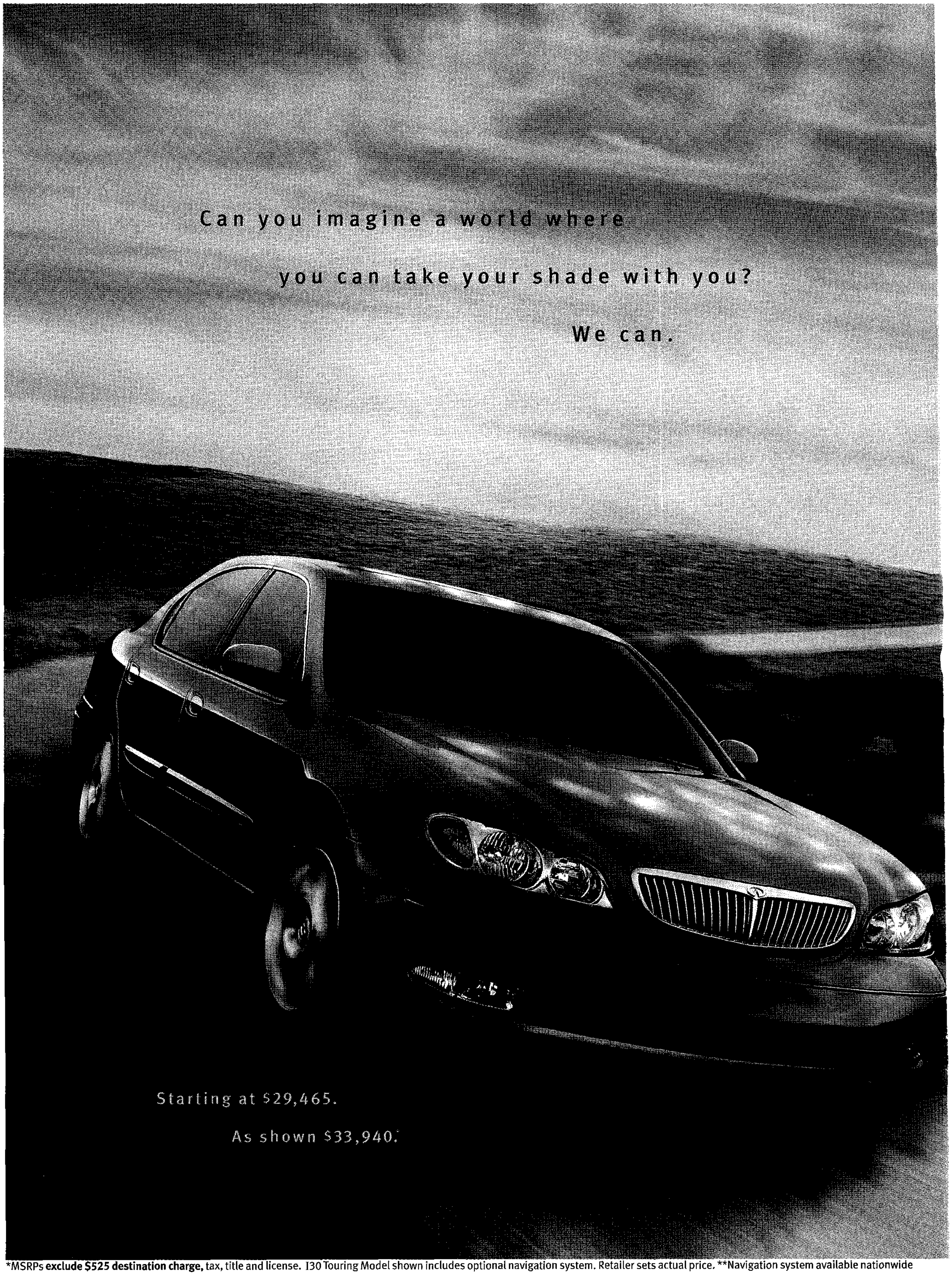
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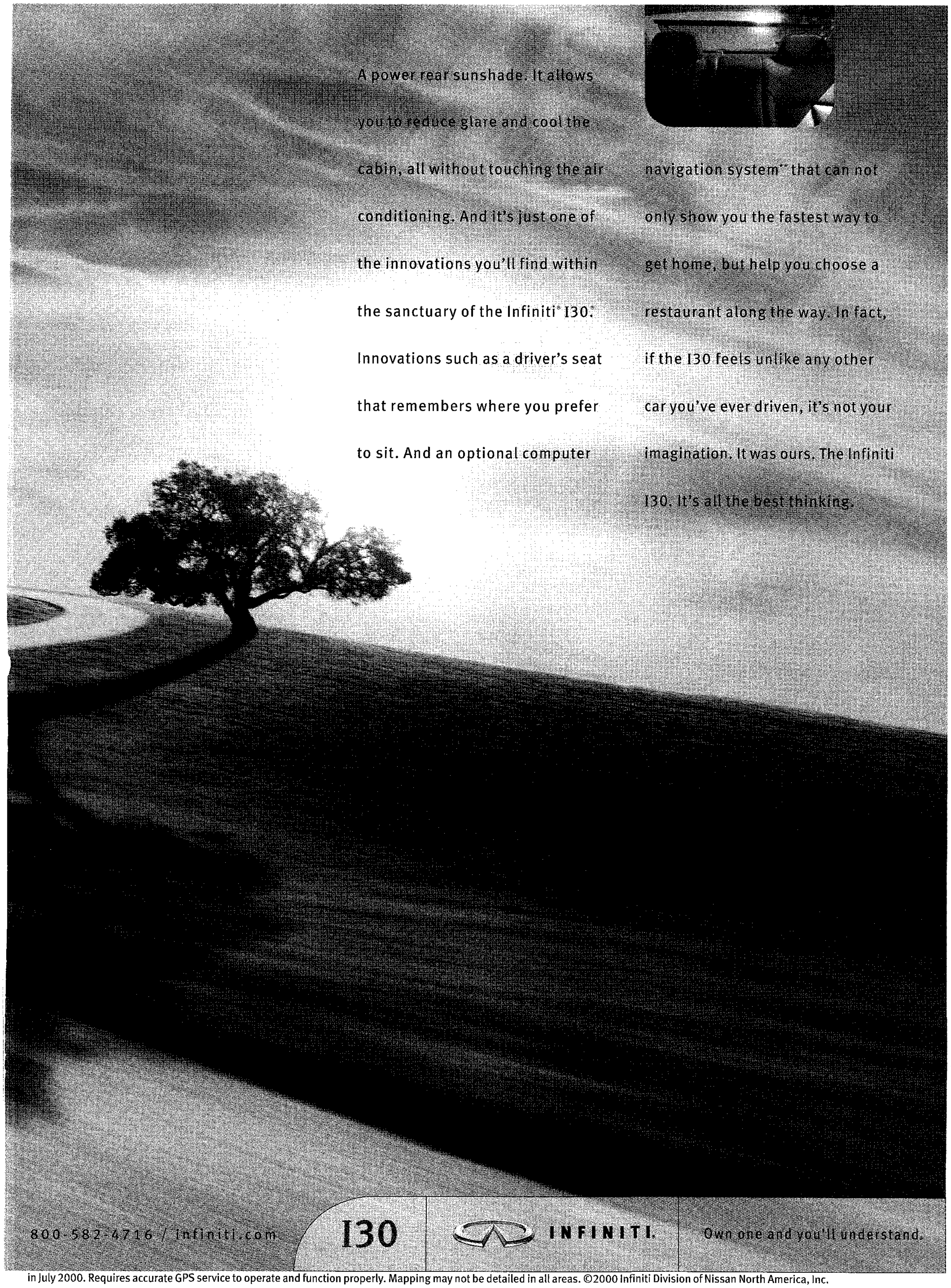

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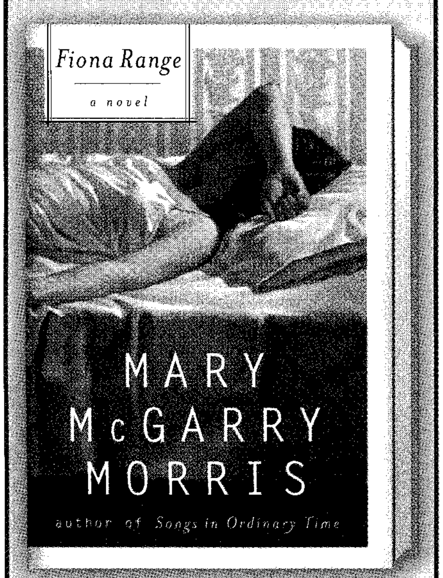

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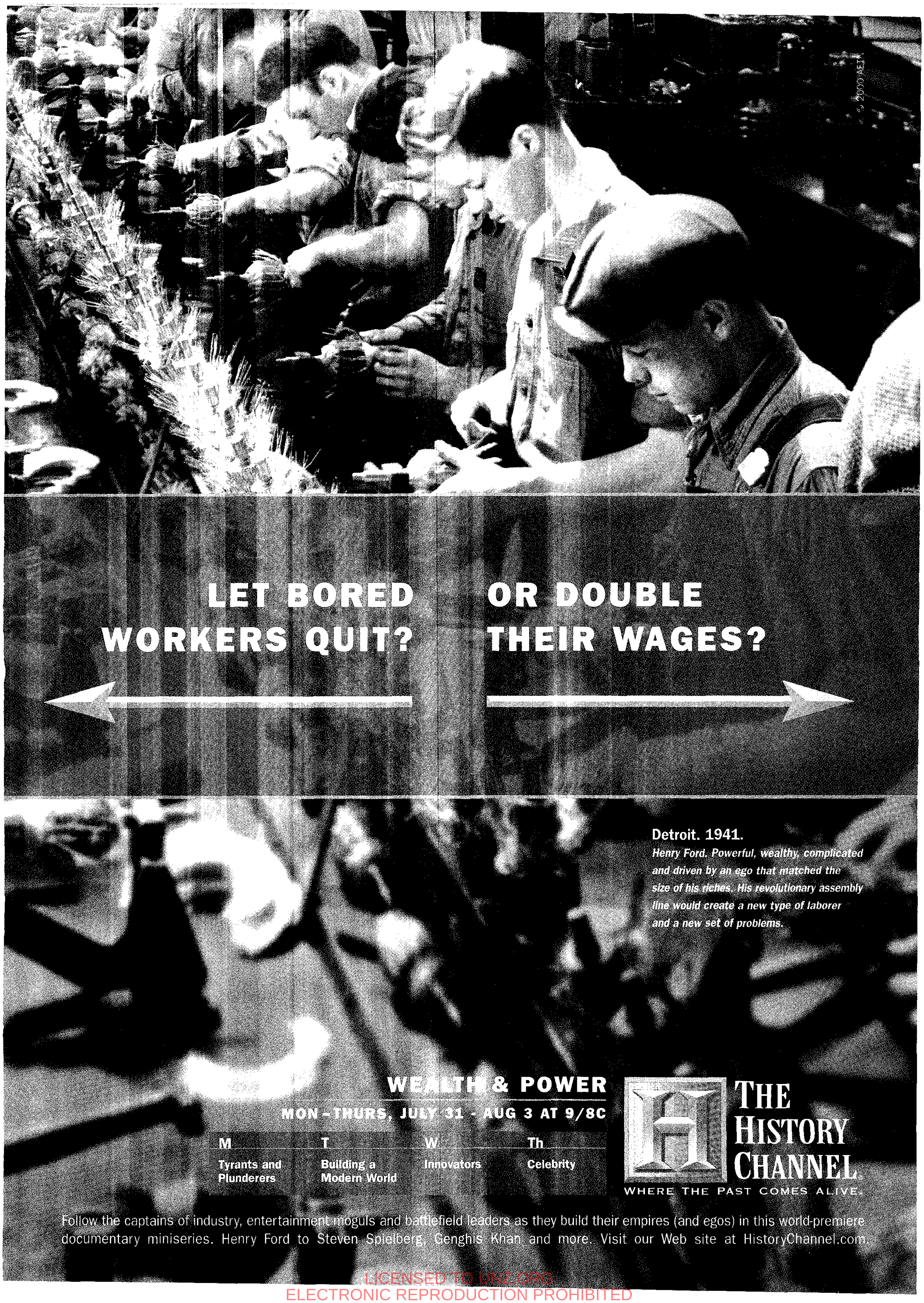
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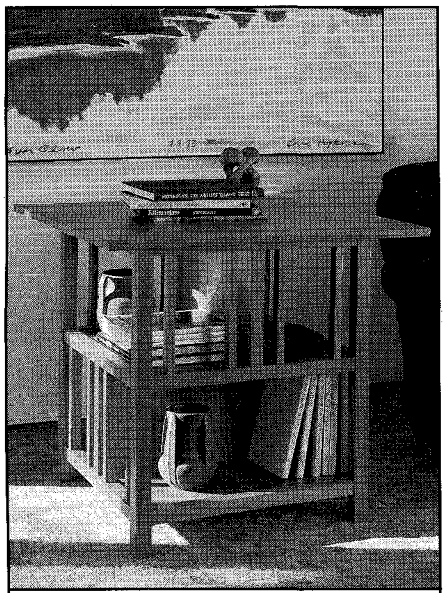

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CONTRIBUTORS

Nicholas Lemann ("Gore Without a Script," p. 44) is a staff writer. His profile of George W. Bush appeared in January. His latest book is "The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy."

Alice Munro (Fiction, p. 64) is the author of a novel and eight collections of stories, including, most recently, "The Love of a Good Woman."

Tad Friend ("The Harriet-the-Spy Club," p. 36) became a staff writer in 1998.

Edward Sorel (Sketchbook, p. 60) will publish a children's book in September entitled "The Saturday Kid," which is an autobiographical account of growing up in New York.

Joan Acocella (Books, p. 74) writes about literature and dance for the magazine. Her book "Willa Cather and the Politics of Criticism" came out in January.

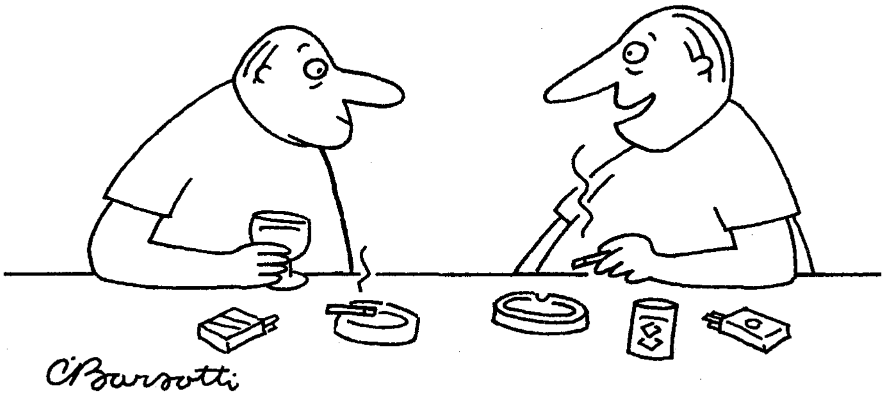
James B. Stewart ("Mousetrap," p. 28) has been a contributor since 1993. He has published six books, among them "Den of Thieves" and "Blind Eye."

John Updike (The Talk of the Town, p. 25) is the author of fifty-one books, including "Golf Dreams: Writings on Golf." His most recent novel is "Gertrude and Claudius."

Michael J. Arlen (Takes, p. 55) began writing for the magazine in 1958. Among his books on television are "Living-Room War" and "The Camera Age."

Alex Ross (Musical Events, p. 82), the magazine's music critic, is working on a book about twentieth-century music.

George Booth (The Back Page, p. 86) has published five collections of cartoons, including "The Essential George Booth," compiled by Lee Lorenz. ♦



"And my lawyer says we have a hell of a case against La-Z-Boy."

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THE MAIL

DISHONEST LIVINGS

Calvin Trillin writes about two people who became involved in insider trading (Annals of Finance, "Marisa and Jeff," July 10th), but he fails to comment on the most important aspect of their backgrounds. "Before I was a broker, I was a normal human being making an honest living," Jeff Streich says. "The only thing illegal I did . . . I used to steal Pop Rocks." It is not "normal" to steal even Pop Rocks, and it was not "an honest living." Similarly, poor Marisa "a couple of times . . . was feeling so pressed that she told the credit-card company that an item she'd actually purchased had appeared on her monthly bill in error." Both of these people are crooks at the core—it's no surprise that their future held greater crimes, and I do not see Marisa as a victim.

David Shur
Berkeley Heights, N.J.

THE POLES OF MORALITY

The July 10th issue serves as a primer on good and evil. How useful it is to have Calvin Trillin's insider-trading weasel Jeff Streich and the tawdry details of Wall Street greed juxtaposed with Paul Farmer's workaday heroism ("The Good Doctor," by Tracy Kidder). Together, these pieces give us the two opposite compass points toward which we can steer our own lives; they make it clear that circumstances are not always so ambiguous or contradictory that we need allegories or myths to teach us what to do.

Lawrence Cosentino
Lansing, Mich.

ART GOES TO THE DOGS

The lack of irony that Peter Schjeldahl seems to admire in Jeff Koons's "Puppy" ("The Blooming Beast," July 3rd) is the intrinsic flaw of the work, and reveals the shortcomings of a hysteric like Koons. Warhol made ambivalence patent in his work. Koons keeps it hidden (from himself as well as from his viewers, one suspects), and Schjeldahl buys into this deception, as if persistent sentimentality were itself a philosophical statement. Get over yourself, he says. How can a human being not love a puppy? If Schjeldahl reads Koons correctly, and I believe he does, Koons must take a back seat to Charles Schulz as an artist, let alone Norman Rockwell.

Daniel N. Haines
New York, N.Y.

CHARDIN AND HEMINGWAY

In his reflection on Chardin's paintings ("Stillness," July 17th), Mr. Schjeldahl comments, "Chardin's most penetrating motif explicitly involves death: still-lifes with freshly killed game animals. . . . They strike me as the deadest things in art—vibrantly, lyrically so." Hemingway comes close to Chardin's achievement. Although he borrowed techniques of perspective shift, omission, and focal concentration from Cézanne's palette, he also put the death motif to good use, as in the opening of "In Another Country": "There was much game hanging outside the shops, and the snow powdered in the fur of the foxes and the wind blew their tails. The deer hung stiff and heavy and empty, and small birds blew in the wind and the wind turned their feathers. It was a cold fall and the wind came down from the mountains." The story involves the narrator, who has been wounded, and another invalid soldier undergoing physical therapy in Milan during the First World War. This opening *nature morte* symbolically foreshadows that there will be no escape from the disability, cold, and death that these characters face as the story unfolds. Chardin himself would have felt the chill.

Lee Gaillard
Philadelphia, Pa.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to "The Mail," The New Yorker, 4 Times Square, New York, N.Y. 10036. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047 or sent via E-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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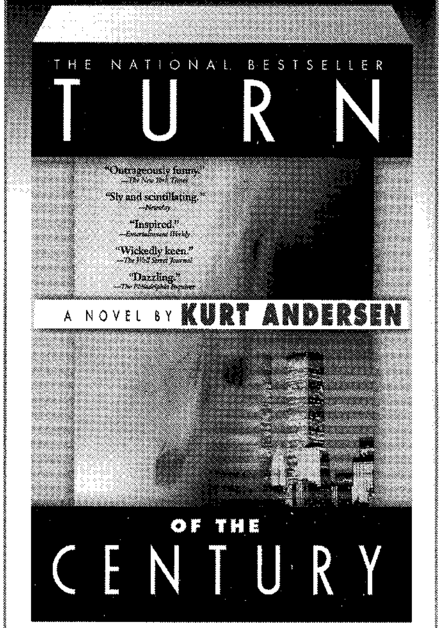
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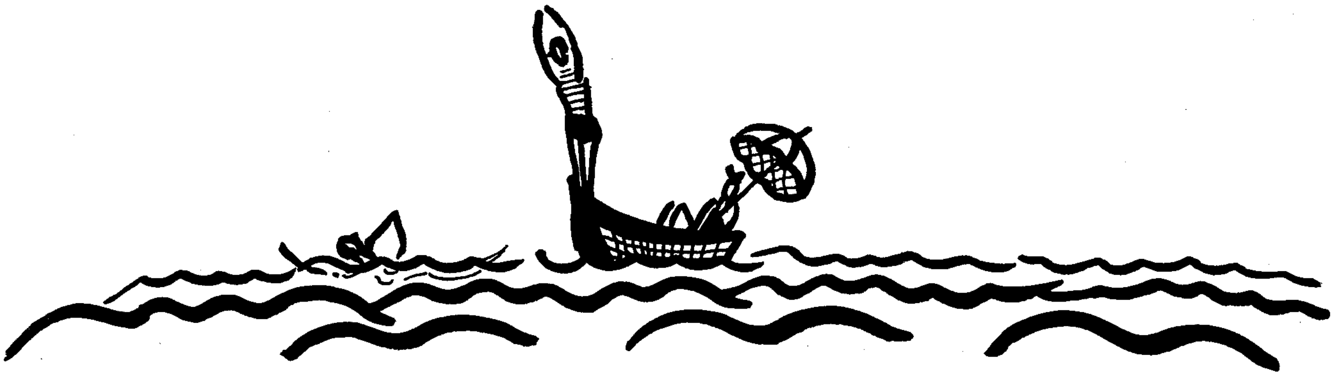

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

AVOW
A progressive priest refuses to marry two gay men, in a new drama by Bill C. Davis ("Mass Appeal"). Preview on July 26. Opens July 27 at 7. (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

BAAL
The Bat Theatre Company's version of Brecht's first play. Previews begin July 27. (The Flea, 41 White St., between Broadway and Church St. 226-2407.)

GODSPELL
An updated version of the 1971 rock musical, with music and new lyrics by Stephen Schwartz. In previews. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 239-6200.)

HIGH INFIDELITY
In John Dooley's comedy, John Davidson and Morgan Fairchild star as a Presidential candidate and his wife, who are forced to participate in marriage counselling by their political party. In previews. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

THE JERUSALEM SYNDROME
The comedian Marc Maron's autobiographical one-man show about his search for religious meaning, which took him to Kerouac's grave, Hollywood, the Philip Morris plant, and Israel. Preview on July 26. Opens July 27 at 8. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 741-0391.)

THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER
Nathan Lane and Jean Smart lead the cast in a Roundabout revival of Kaufman and Hart's 1939 comedy. Jerry Zaks is the director. Two previews on July 26. Opens July 27 at 8. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300.)

SPINNING INTO BUTTER
Rebecca Gilman's drama about the aftermath of a racist incident at a politically correct Vermont college. Daniel Sullivan is the director. Opens July 26 at 6:45. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

AIDA
Disney's new musical—five years in the making and a product of Pharaonic expense—is, if not perfect, a lively, polished entertainment with bursts of joyful flamboyance worthy of its composer, Elton John. The two female leads—Heather Headley, as Aida, and Sherie René Scott, as Amneris—shine in their different ways, and Bob Crowley's brilliant sets give the show both visual dazzle and emotional resonance. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/10/00.) (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.)

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THE AMERICAN LIVING ROOM
The performance space HERE's summer festival, highlighting the work of thirty-nine emerging directors. (145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. For tickets and information, call 647-0202.)

AQUILA THEATRE COMPANY
The British-American touring troupe is in town for the summer, presenting repertory performances of "The Iliad" and "The Comedy of Errors" through Aug. 6. The residency continues through Sept. 17. (Hemmerdinger Hall, 100 Washington Sq. E. 307-4100.)

CAPITOL STEPS
The musical-theatre troupe's latest political satire, "It Ain't Over 'Til the First Lady Sings." (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

CHICAGO CITY LIMITS
The improv company presents a new revue, "Chicago City Limits Turns 20: Now and Forever . . . and We Mean It." (Chicago City Limits Theatre, 1105 First Ave., at 61st St. 888-5233.)

CONTACT
The director and choreographer Susan Stroman's dance play, a triptych of simple stories about the various forms of human connection and the atmosphere of longing, is a big-hearted, witty crowd-pleaser. (10/18 & 10/25/99) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

COPENHAGEN
Michael Frayn's play speculates on the controversial 1941 reunion of the two giants of quantum mechanics—the physicists Niels Bohr (Philip Bosco) and Werner Heisenberg (Michael Cumpsty). It is so meticulous, so admirable, and so grave that you want to tousle its well-kempt appearance and tell it to lighten up. Nevertheless, the director, Michael Blakemore, manages to make dynamic and suggestive an evening that consists of three actors (Blair Brown plays Margrethe Bohr) and three chairs. (4/24 & 5/1/00) (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE CRUMPLE ZONE
A dark comedy by Buddy Thomas, set during a Christmas gathering of five gay men. (Rattlestick Theatre, 224 Waverly Pl. 532-8887.)

THE DANCE ON WIDOWS' ROW
Four rich widows throw a party for the town widowers, in a comedy by Samm-Art Williams. (Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand St. 353-1176. Closes July 30.)

DIRTY BLONDE
Mae West's flirty and dirty persona is the subject of a cunningly written, raffish evening conceived by the writer-actress Claudia Shear and the director James Lapine. Mae's story is recounted with brio by two fans—Jo (Shear, who doubles winningly as Mae) and Charlie (Tom Riis Farrell). The success of the play rests not on the louche facts of West's life but on the intersection of her story with the sweetness of the evolving relationship between the two lost souls who narrate it. (2/7/00) (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

EMERGING ARTISTS
The final installation in the Performing Garage's summer festival is "Rodan (a Jive Hummer)," a meditation on failure by the troupe Radiohole. July 27-30 at 8. (33 Wooster St. 966-3651.)

FESTIVAL OF INDIAN THEATRE
Works by contemporary Indian playwrights, performed in English by the original Indian casts. Vijay Dendulkar's "Once upon a Fleeting Bird" wraps up the festival. July 28-Aug. 1 at 8 and Aug. 2 at 7. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 346-8510.)

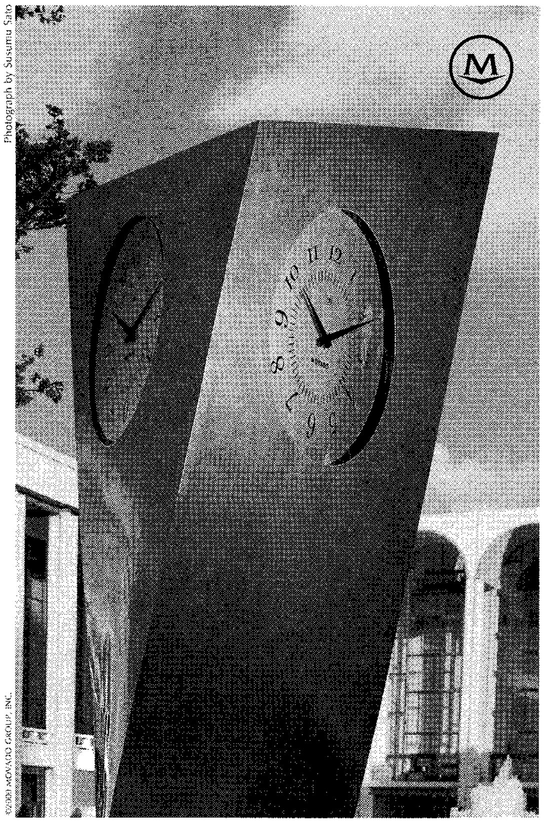
FOR COLORED GIRLS WHO HAVE CONSIDERED SUICIDE WHEN THE RAINBOW IS ENUF
Ntozake Shange's 1974 choreopoem, directed by George Faison. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200. Closes Aug. 16.)

GREAT BLACK ONE-ACTS
A festival of plays by black writers, staged by Woodie King, Jr.,'s National Black Touring Circuit. (Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand St. 353-1176. Closes Aug. 6.)

HIP-HOP THEATRE FESTIVAL
Two one-woman shows: "Surface Transit," by Sarah Jones, who portrays eight urban characters, and "Sistah Supreme," an autobiographical piece by Liza Colón-Zayas. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

ICE FACTORY FESTIVAL 2000
Soho Think Tank's summer shindig highlighting new works continues with "Speak Low (When You Speak of Love)," an adaptation of the letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya. July 26-29 at 7. The festival continues through Aug. 12. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 966-4844.)

JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR
This misguided Broadway revival of Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber's 1971 musical version of the Saviour's last days on earth starts out by asking the tantalizing question "What's the buzz?"



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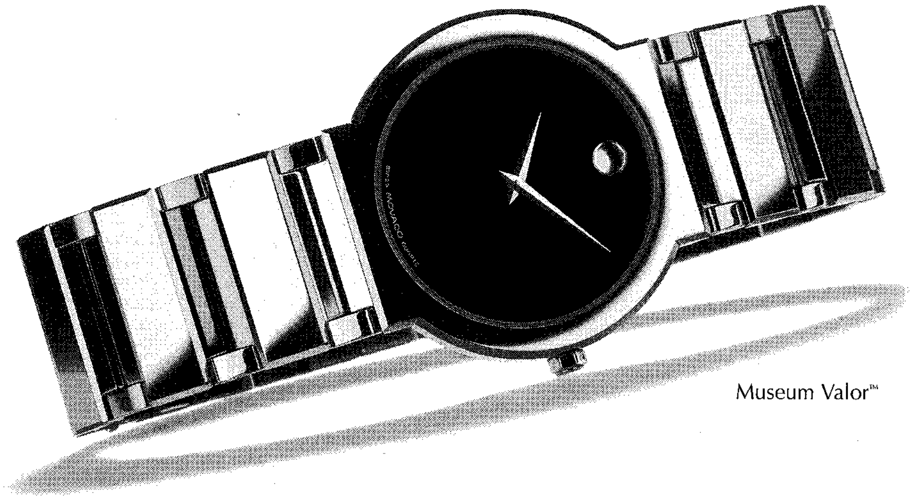

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but never delivers a theatrically satisfying answer. Still, with its archaic whiff of right-wing outrage and its singable seventies-rock score, it's fun for nostalgia's sake. (Ford Center for the Performing Arts, 213 W. 43rd St. 307-4100.)

JESUS HOPPED THE A TRAIN
A man is imprisoned for murdering a cult leader, in a comedy-drama by Stephen Adly Guirgis. Philip Seymour Hoffman, recently seen in "True West," is the director. (Center Stage, 48 W. 21st St. 929-2228. Closes Aug. 12.)

JITNEY
August Wilson's play is set in a car-service station in 1977, in a part of Pittsburgh which is being demolished faster than it's being renovated. In this atmosphere of decay, Wilson's characters struggle with themselves and with each other to find some hope, and some peace, amidst the rubble. The cast of nine wonderful actors hit perfect notes of collision and cohesion, and turn what might otherwise be a draggy experience (the play runs to nearly three hours) into a riveting and moving one. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422.)

JOE FEARLESS (A FAN DANCE)
A great and irresistible idea—above-the-rim basketball choreographed for the stage—attached to a goofy melodrama, in which the title character loses his job, wife, kids, and even his TV as a result of his fanatical devotion to his team. The basketball overshadows the drama, which takes place smack in the middle of the games (literally: the alley-oop passes sail right over the TV-room couch). But the athlete-actors pull off Globetrotter high jinks right on cue, the cheerleaders dance with exaggerated licentiousness, and the accompanying jock interviews and talk-radio postmortems are both on target and hilariously over the top. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

KISS ME, KATE
With all its admirable expertise and its various delights, this production of the Cole Porter musical is oddly earthbound: it comes down to the vexing issue of chemistry. The leads, Marin Mazzie and Brian Stokes Mitchell, are expert players, but they are not—in the true meaning of the words—star performers. (11/29/99) (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE LARAMIE PROJECT
A drama about the murder of gay-hate victim Matthew Shepard, written and directed by Moisés Kaufman. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

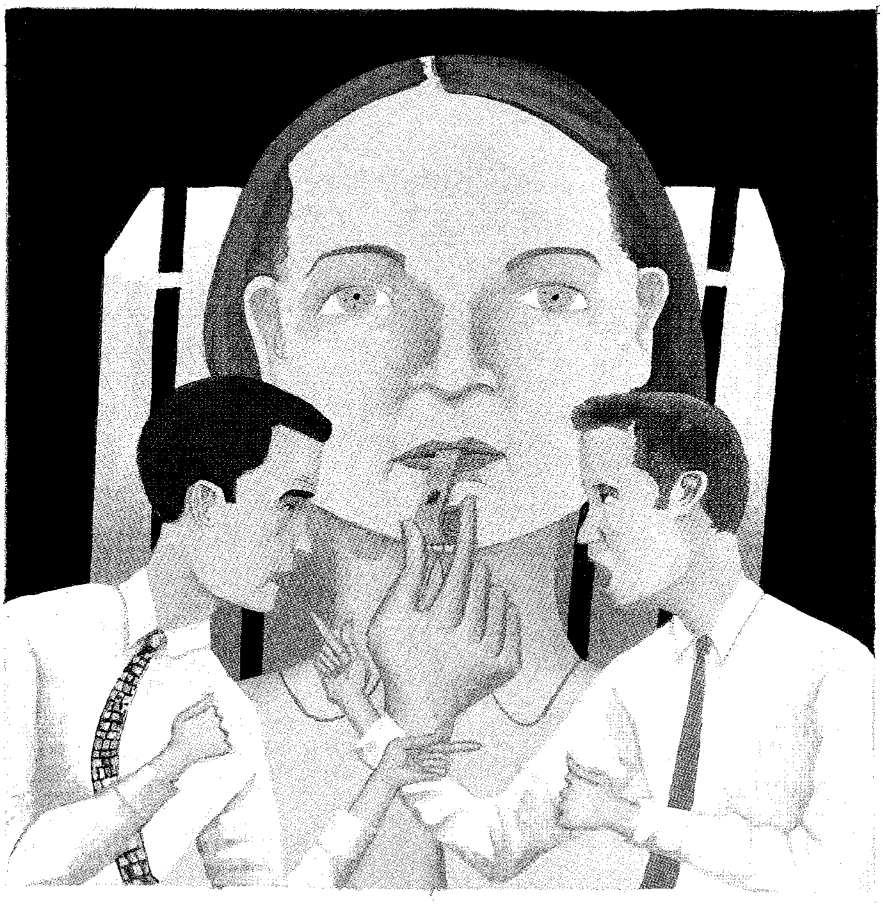
MEASURE FOR MEASURE
The Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival's version. (Boscobel Restoration, Garrison, N.Y. For ticket information and directions, call 914-265-9575. Closes July 30.)

THE MUSIC MAN
A delightful revival of Meredith Willson's 1957 musical, directed by Susan Stroman and starring Craig Bierko, who is making his Broadway début in the role of Professor Harold Hill. The show hits us with the simplicity and seamlessness of a perfect fairy tale, and it puts music in its proper place—right up there with all the other miracles of life. (5/22/00) (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.)

NEIL SIMON'S HOTEL SUITE
The setups for these reheated fragments from Simon's "Suite" plays have the feel of stale seventies sitcoms, but they rate high on the middle-aged crowd's Laff-O-Meter and capture, however unwittingly, the innocence and humor of decades past. The cast (Helen Carey, Randy Graff, Leigh Lawson, Ron Orbach, Charlie McWade, and Amanda Serkasevich) all shine in their own ways. (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 307-4100. Closes Aug. 10.)

NEVER SWIM ALONE
The Canadian playwright Daniel MacIvor's latest dark comedy—thirteen scenes concerned with the lifelong friendship of two men. (Soho Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

PROOF
The young playwright David Auburn's drama stars Mary-Louise Parker as the daughter of a brilliant University of Chicago mathematician, whose life and career began to disintegrate in his mid-twenties when he became mentally ill. Parker's character appears to have similar gifts and, possibly, similar troubles, and Parker skillfully delivers the smart and sullen, insolent and indolent goods. You wish the play were a little richer, a little less simply resolved, but its level of accomplishment and the realness of its characters show that Auburn has both depth and a voice. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes July 30.)



Douglas Dickerman, Susan O'Connor, and John Maria, in "Never Swim Alone."

KATHY OSBORN

THE REAL THING
Revived here with an excellent cast (especially Stephen Dillane) and subtle direction by David Leveaux, Tom Stoppard's 1984 drama remains the wittiest, sharpest look at that twisted thing called love to come around in decades. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

RIVERDANCE
The Irish troupe of dancers, singers, and musicians. (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER
John Travolta is not easy to replace, nor are the ashes of disco fever likely to reignite, as this show, based on the 1977 movie, demonstrates. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARK(ING LOT)
Expanded Arts' sixth season of free outdoor Shakespeare continues with "A Midsummer Night's Dream." (Municipal Parking Lot at Broome and Ludlow Sts. For information about reservations, which are required, call 358-5096. Closes Aug. 5.)

SWING!
No plot, just a hot band, Olympic-class dancers, and major panties—this show, a tribute to swing and its dance counterpart, the Lindy (mother of the jitterbug), lives up to its name. Directed and choreographed by Lynne Taylor-Corbett. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

TRUE WEST
A sensational revival of Sam Shepard's 1980 play, directed by Matthew Warchus and starring Josh Brolin and Elias Koteas. It's a droll tall tale of sibling rivalry, in which an intrusive, beer-swilling outlaw named Lee and his brother, Austin, a put-upon Ivy League screenwriter, face off in their vacationing mother's tidy modern kitchen. (3/27/00) (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200. Closes July 29.)

WHEN THEY SPEAK OF RITA
Daisy B. Foote's drama, about a discontented housewife in rural New Hampshire. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-3052.)

LONG RUNS

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.

CHICAGO
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

DINNER WITH FRIENDS
Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave.,
at 14th St. 239-6200.

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY
Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200.

FOSSE
Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St.
307-4100.

RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

DANCE

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE
The troupe performs "Revelations" with roughly the same regularity that the New York City Ballet performs "The Nutcracker," and for many of the same reasons: it's a stirring classic that brings in the crowds. But Ailey rarely works with vocalists and an orchestra, as it will in this engagement,

dancing, for the most part, to recorded music instead. The company is one of the sharpest performing today, and it's even sharper with live accompaniment: the difference that the infusion of live music makes is both subtle and astounding. July 25 and July 28-29 at 8 and July 30 at 3: "Grace," the première of "Double Exposure," choreographed by Judith Jamison, and "Revelations." ♦ July 26-27 at 8 and July 29 at 2: "Blues Suite," "Memoria," "Pas de Duke," and "Revelations." (New York State Theatre. 721-6500.)

"POUR ANTIGONE"
The French choreographer Mathilde Monnier presents a full-length work inspired by the Sophoclean tragedy and created in collaboration with African dancers from Burkina Faso and Mali (as well as several European ones chosen for their "power to let themselves go"). (LaGuardia Concert Hall, Amsterdam Ave. at 65th St. 721-6500. July 26 and July 28-29 at 8:30.)

DANCES FOR WAVE HILL
The annual outdoor series of site-specific works commissioned for the Bronx garden by Dancing in the Streets closes with the works of four choreographers from the dance collective the Field, Aviva Geismar, Heather Harrington, Tiffany Mills, and Philippa Kaye. (675 W. 252nd St., the Bronx. 718-549-3200. July 26 at 6:30 and July 30 at 5.)

NOCHE FLAMENCA
The eleven-member company, under the direction of Martin Santangelo, offers new work ("La Plaza," in which competing flamenco stylists meet and trade steps at a marketplace) in addition to its satisfying repertory of traditional forms: the *alegrías, farrucas,* and, best of all, the *soleá,* performed by Soledad Barrio, who can transform the most demanding passages of percussive footwork into reflective turns of great sadness and introspection. (Connelly Theatre, 220 E. 4th St. 279-4200. July 25-29 at 8 and July 30 at 5. Through Aug. 13.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW DANCE FESTIVAL
July 25-28 at 8, July 29 at 2 and 8, and July 30 at 2: Paul Taylor Dance Company. ♦ July 27-28 at 8:15 and July 29-30 at 5: Taylor 2. (Becket, Mass. For information about tickets, call 413-243-0745.)

NIGHT LIFE

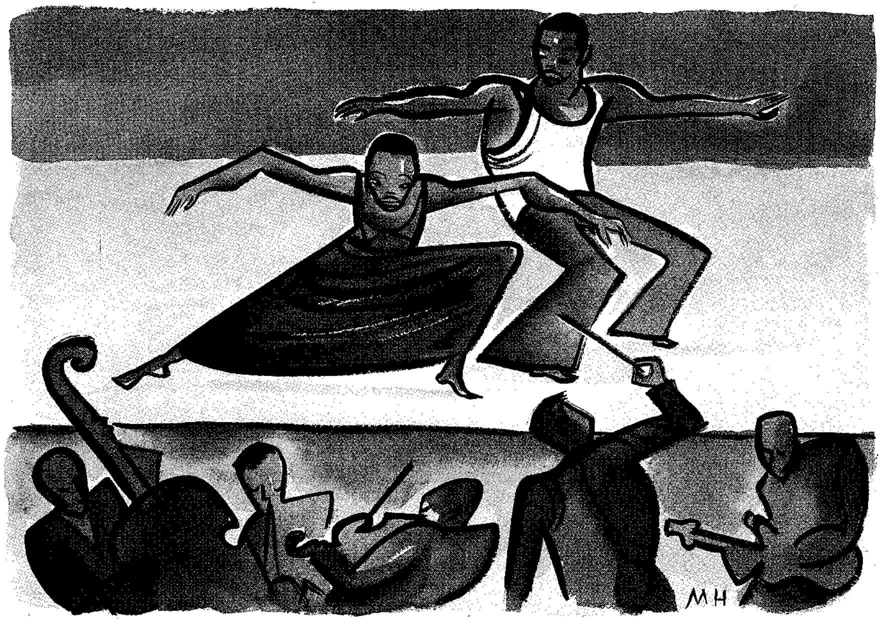
CONCERTS

MIDSUMMER NIGHT SWING
Highlights of the alfresco dance festival: July 26: **Rob Fisher and His Coffee Club Orchestra** provide the soundtrack for Dessert Night, an event during which pastries from some of the city's finer restaurants will be available for tasting. ♦ July 29: **Illinois Jacquet.** Every opportunity to hear the great tenor saxophonist Jacquet should be seized—his wide-as-Texas tone and melodic eloquence are matched by an exuberance that is like a bull breaking free of its pen. (Fountain Plaza, Lincoln Center. For more information, call 875-5766. All shows at 8:15. Dance lessons are offered at 6:30.)

"JAZZ IN JULY"
July 26 at 8: It takes stout-hearted musicians to attempt to play with Louis Armstrong, even if it's a virtual Satchmo. Still, in what promises to be the highlight of the evening, a few brave souls, including **Bill Charlap, Peter Appleyard,** and **Jay Leonhart,** will play alongside a recording of "West End Blues" and add their two cents to Armstrong's masterpiece. On safer ground will be pianist/composer **Dick Hyman,** who presents his epic, "The Longest Blues in the World." ♦ July 27 at 2:30 and 8: The idea behind a tribute to Django Reinhardt which uses the music of Woody Allen's films—and features performances by **Dick Hyman, Howard Alden, Bucky Pizzarelli,** and others—is less strained than it may seem. Hyman has contributed compositions to Allen's films for more than two decades, including the recent "Sweet and Lowdown." Besides, any excuse that unites the two reigning masters of prewar guitar styles—Alden and Pizzarelli—and resurrects the swinging violinist **Johnny Frigo** is more than valid. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

BOUKMAN EKSPERYANS
The ten-piece Haitian ensemble performs as a part of the Lincoln Center Festival. (New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 W. 64th St. 875-5030. July 26 at 9.)

JUNIOR BROWN
A deep-voiced Indiana cowboy with a flair for songs about heartbreak, hillbillies, and fools, Brown is something of a country-and-Western throwback. He has a sense of humor, too: his guitar-propelled material is populated with state troopers and hula girls. (Castle Clinton, Battery Park. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 835-2789. July 27 at 7.)



Alvin Ailey performs to live music, at the Lincoln Center Festival.

MARCELLUS HALL

LINTON KWESI JOHNSON / DAVID RUDDER
Johnson, a Jamaican native who lives in England, is one of the founders of the musical form known as dub poetry, and his highly political, often satirical lyrics are central to the appeal of his reggae-infused music. / Rudder is a native Trinidadian calypso singer who cut his teeth backing the legendary Lord Kitchener. A part of the Lincoln Center Festival. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. July 27 at 8.)

RON AFFIF
On his recent album of unaccompanied jazz guitar, "Solotude," Affif displayed a subdued side to his normally extroverted personality—a good sign for this gifted player whose speed sometimes gets the best of him. (Rose Center for Earth and Space, American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St. 769-5100. July 28 at 5:45 and 7:15.)

MUNGAL PATASAR & PANTAR / SAN JOSÉ SERENADERS
Trinidad may be best known for steel drums and calypso, but as these two ensembles demonstrate, the music of the West Indian island is a bit more complicated. Patasar is a sitar player, and his ensemble combines an Indian influence with steel drums, reggae rhythms, and jazz structures. / The Serenaders offer *parang* music (the term is derived from *parranda,* a Spanish word for merrymaking), a form that's popular around Yuletide and dates back some five centuries, to when Trinidad was a Spanish possession. A part of the Lincoln Center Festival. (New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 W. 64th St. 875-5030. July 28 at 9.)

ANGIE STONE
In the early nineties, the Columbia, South Carolina, native founded the critically acclaimed soul trio Vertical Hold and co-wrote a number of tracks on D'Angelo's début album, "Brown Sugar." D'Angelo returned the favor by helping with a song on Stone's recent solo début, "Black Diamond," which is lush with heartfelt alto singing and deep grooves. (Central Park SummerStage, Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. For more information, call 360-2777. No tickets necessary. July 29 at 3.)

SANTANA / MACY GRAY
Supernatural, indeed. Since he has sold some twelve million copies of his Arista comeback album (thanks to the songwriting efforts of a pod of hipsters handpicked by recently ousted label president Clive Davis), the veteran guitarist is in the midst of an apparently endless summer. All he has to do is solo loudly—in his instantly recognizable way—and fans will likely be satisfied. / Gray is the helium-voiced R. & B. sensation whose effortlessly memorable melodies and sweet-and-scratchy vocals make her sound alarmingly like Al Green's long-lost little sister. (Jones Beach Theatre. 516-221-1000. July 29-30 at 7:30.)

KALI / BEETHOVA OBAS / CHRIS COMBETTE
A triple bill of French Caribbean music. Kali is from Martinique, and his music fuses local dance rhythms, such as *zouk,* with political lyrics and the unexpected sounds of his instrument of choice, the banjo. / Obas, the son of the noted Haitian painter Charles Obas—who was killed for his political views by the Duvalier regime—is a troubadour with a sweet voice and a gentle acoustic guitar who turns out songs as mellow as a tropical breeze. / Combette was born in French Guiana, and he strips the *zouk* of its typical synthesizers and horns in favor of very personal guitar work. A part of the Lincoln Center Festival. (Avery Fisher Hall. For more information, call 875-5030. July 29 at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BAM CAFÉ
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4139)—July 28: **Chocolate Genius** is Marc Anthony Thompson, a vocalist with a gift for incisive personal narratives and an emotionally keyed-up delivery. July 29: Former Kid Creole and the Coconuts member **Coati Mundi** stops by with his Rumbaphonic Band.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
243 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—July 28-29: Texas roadhouse blues with the **Fabulous Thunderbirds.**

Aug. 1: In 1994, David Crosby agreed to meet a young keyboard player named James Raymond, who also happened to be Crosby's long-lost biological son. The meeting proved fruitful, both musically and emotionally, as the two men began to write songs together. The result of that collaboration, **CPR**, hews close to the harmony-laden folk that has always been Crosby's trademark.

BROWNIES

169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—July 26: The **Galerkin Method,** a self-effacing band that gives off a faint odor of black magic. Galerkin instruments include hammered dulcimer, accordion, violin, musical saw, guitar, bass, and drums, and the band uses odd meters and some dark, exotic allusions to Eastern European melodies and North African drumming. Close your eyes and the combination of trancelike rhythms, ethereal vocals, and a sweet-and-sad violin make you feel as though you're diving into the sea from Casablanca or Dubrovnik.

FEZ

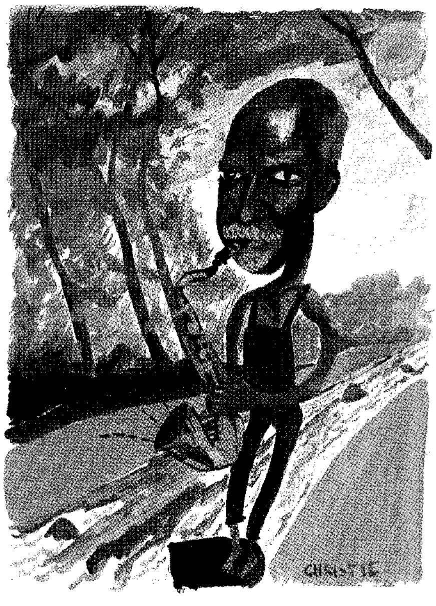
380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—July 25-26: The fierce and uncompromising singer-songwriter **Toshi Reagon,** appearing here with her band Big Lovely, once turned down a major record deal because the corporate brass wanted to reshape her image. After years of releasing her records herself, she's found a home on the indie label Razor & Tie. Her latest album, "The Righteous Ones," packs a wallop, and her live shows shower audiences with retro funk, urban blues, and folk. Dining.

IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—July 27: Roots rock with a dash of New Orleans from **Cowboy Mouth.** ♦ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the Society, call 696-9737.

KNITTING FACTORY

74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—July 26: The neo-psychedelic tendencies of the Athens, Georgia, quartet **Elf Power.** July 26: The Brooklyn ensemble **Les Sans Culottes** plays raunchy faux-French rock that's both a sendup of and a tribute to late-period Serge Gainsbourg and punchy *yé-yé* girl pop.



Fathead Newman, at the Village Vanguard.

GREG CHRISTIE

MAXWELL'S

1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—July 26: The **Getaway People,** a funky, sample-heavy quintet from Norway. July 28: **Toshi Reagon and Big Lovely** (see Fez).

MERCURY LOUNGE

217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—July 26: **Jack Lukeman,** a former auto mechanic turned Emerald Isle pop phenom. July 29: **Hank Williams III.** The grandson of country music's biggest legend has a début album, "Risin' Outlaw," that's as pure and true to its roots as backcountry moonshine. But Williams has also done time in Atlanta punk bands, and he's been known to turn his marathon shows into rocking affairs.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—The tenor saxophonist **Lew Tabackin** (here July 27-29) may be the perfect instrumentalist to present a tribute to Coleman Hawkins, the father of the jazz tenor saxophone. A meat-and-potatoes rhythm section—pianist **Richard Wyands,** bassist **Dennis Irwin,** and drummer **Kenny Washington,** along with trumpeter **Randy Brecker**—will assist the mighty Tabackin in his evocation of a classic player who blew notes as though he were igniting individual sticks of dynamite. If "Body and Soul" isn't played, demand your money back. Dining.

IRIDIUM

48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—By taking on the tenor and soprano saxophones just like his father, John, **Ravi Coltrane** (here with his quartet through July 30) hasn't made it easy for himself. But he has survived his apprenticeship years with distinction and individuality; his new recording, "From the Round Box," reveals the winning combination of a full-throated horn sound and a meditative demeanor. Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Through July 30: The **Joanne Brackeen** quartet. The straight and narrow just won't do for Brackeen, the veteran pianist and composer who's been in the jazz trenches

*Optional †Always wear your safety belt and secure children in the rear seat.

too long not to play things her own way. Off-kilter time signatures, often Latin based, and inverted formal structures lend spice to her smart small-group conceptions. Dining.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—July 27-29: Bassist **Mario Pavone** draws more from Charles Mingus than just an aggressive approach to his instrument; he's an atmospheric composer who can coax a lavish sound out of a compact band. The marvellous drummer **Matt Wilson** will assist Pavone in accommodating surprise guest soloists throughout this engagement. July 31: Andy Laster's band **Hydra** continues to score with the ball that Ornette Coleman dropped when he abandoned his inventive, loose-limbed acoustic groups. The new-jazz saxophonist and composer is joined by his longtime rhythm-mates, drummer **Tom Rainey** and bassist **Drew Gress,** as well as trombonist **Curtis Hasselbring,** to celebrate the release of Hydra's new album, "Soft Shell."

MAKOR
35 W. 67th St. (601-1000)—July 27: If **Anthony Coleman's** new Conversos ensemble is anything like his earlier Self Haters and Sephardic Tinge bands, we're all in for some genre-bending fun perpetrated by accomplished players with a serious dedication to irreverence.

UP OVER JAZZ CAFÉ
351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—July 28-29: The **James Spaulding** quintet. Spaulding, a ubiquitous presence on alto saxophone and flute during the sixties, may have smoothed out a few of the edges that characterized his playing back then, but his taste for heated improvisation remains.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through July 30: **David (Fathead) Newman.** The tenor saxophonist has been carrying the banner of gritty soul-jazz since he was the pride of Ray Charles's classic band of the fifties. Newman came up the hard way, and you can hear every second of dues-paying in the way he roughhouses with his instrument. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

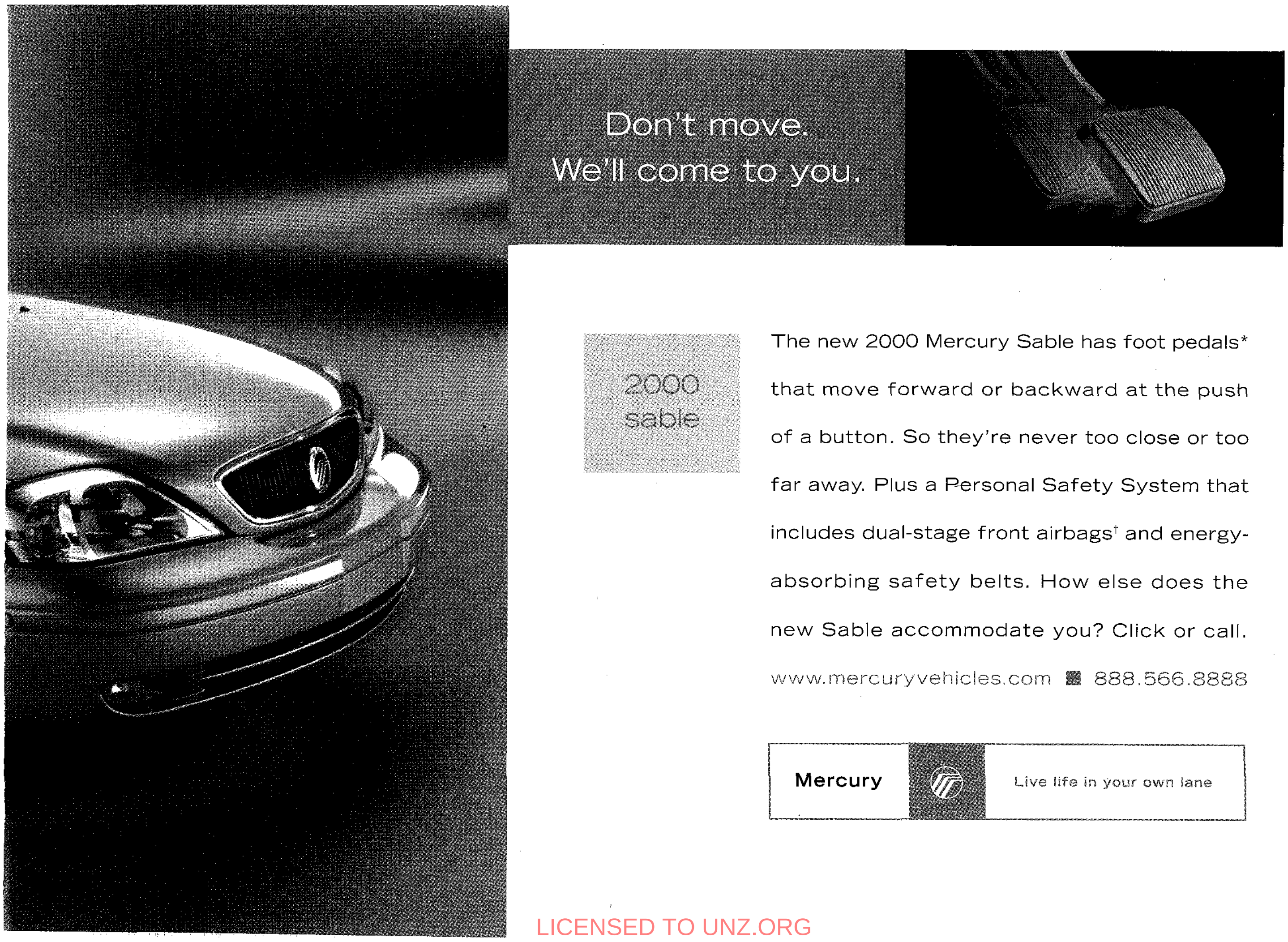
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—Unlike his peers Boucher and Fragonard, Jean-Siméon Chardin devoted himself to simple still-lifes and domestic scenes, creamy works of such beauty that the philosopher Diderot was moved to write, "The magic is incomprehensible." The painter captures his human subjects in moments of quiet reverie, and the show, the first such retrospective to hit New York, casts a similar spell. The still-lifes contain a surprising amount of dead game (after all, the French for "still-life" is "*nature morte*"), and the most influential example, surely, is "The Ray." The gutted fish with the ghoulish grin inspired copies by Van Gogh and Cézanne; Soutine's variation on the theme is on view downstairs in the "Painters in Paris" show. But this early work, which earned the young artist membership in the prestigious Académie Royale, is a rare example of Chardin as showoff. On the whole, his work is marked by a grace and dignity that reveal the miraculous in the everyday. Through Sept. 3. ♦ "Paughtraits," as he dubbed them, made John Singer Sargent famous, but he was testy about the genre. "I abhor and abjure them, and hope never to do another, especially of the Upper Classes," he wrote to a fellow painter. He would, one imagines, have been delighted by **"Beyond the Portrait Studio,"** an exhibition of his landscapes and works on paper, most of them donated to the museum half a century ago by the artist's sister. The hundred or so images on view show Sargent at his amazing best and embarrassing worst, from his dazzling watercolors of sunlit brooks to his sentimental homoerotic scenes of English soldiers sunbathing. Among the most astonishing images are the earliest: at fourteen, Sargent's technical facility was already eerie, with a mechanical precision that cools one's exhilaration. Through Sept. 24. ♦ **"Other Pictures: Vernacular Photographs from the Thomas Walther Collection."** Through Aug. 27. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—**"Making Choices."** The twenty-four-part show concentrates on works made between 1920 and 1960, drawn exclusively from the museum's extensive holdings, in a series of tightly focussed exhibitions, several devoted to a single artist (Man Ray, Cartier-Bresson, Morandi). Closing, in stages, on Aug. 22, Sept. 19, and Sept. 26. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—**"1900: Art at the Crossroads"** reopens a sort of art-world time capsule, contrasting representative works from the movements that took shape at the beginning of the past century. Through Sept. 10. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—When a show is touted as "introducing an entirely new medium for art making," it's easy for the bells and whistles of invention to drown out the art. Fortunately, video artist Tony Oursler has been playing with technology long enough that even high-definition volumetric display, which creates hologramlike illusions of three-dimensional projections floating in space, can't upstage him: the new work is, in typical Oursler fashion, in-



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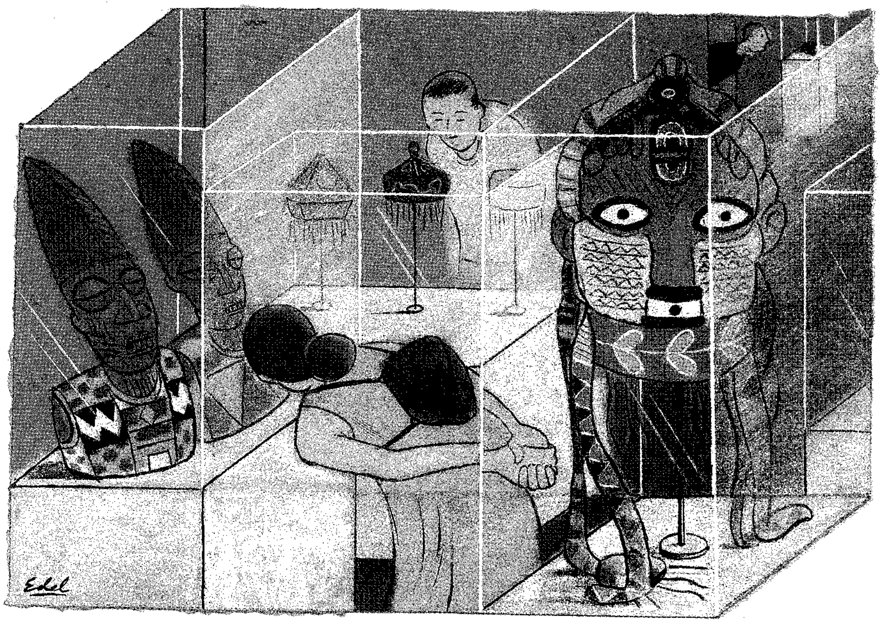
scrutably mesmerizing. He creates an updated camera obscura, out of a three-foot lens, two video projections (flickering simultaneously with images of flames, card tricks, and scenes of special-effects makeup being applied), and a glass figurine in the shape of the devil (a reference to sixteenth-century diagrams of the camera obscura which showed demons in the apparatus) which appears to dangle eerily before your eyes. Through Oct. 31. ♦ What's black and white and red all over? Barbara Kruger's confrontational retrospective, jam-packed with the artist's familiar tabloid-style images that superimpose political aphorisms—("Your body is a battleground," "It's a small world, but not if you have to clean it") on found black-and-white photographs. The imagery smacks of the "Father Knows Best" generation, and Kruger delivers a roundhouse punch to Dad (as well as the institutional Big Brother) in a series of floor-to-ceiling installations that hammer home inequities of gender, race, and class. Through Oct. 22. ♦ **"The Art of Alice Neel,"** the museum's second retrospective devoted to the artist, and the first since her death, in 1984, offers seventy-five paintings and watercolors, including likenesses of artists (Andy Warhol, Robert Smithson), writers (Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Fearing), and family members. Through Sept. 17. ♦ **"Carnival Strippers: Photographs by Susan Meiselas."** Through Sept. 10. (Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 9.)



"Beads, Body, and Soul," an exhibition of Yoruban art, at the Museum for African Art.

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

MUSEUM FOR AFRICAN ART
593 Broadway (966-1313)—**"Beads, Body, and Soul: Art and Light in the Yorùbá Universe,"** the downtown half of a joint exhibition, presented in collaboration with the Studio Museum in Harlem (144 W. 125th St; 864-4500). The arm's-length presentation—the precious, handmade objects are understandably shielded by rails and vitrines—reminds museumgoers of a recurrent problem (how to present sacred art in a secular culture), but the Plexiglas can't dim the exuberance of these tunics, mitres, crowns, coronets, pillbox hats, drums, chairs, and foot cushions, all of which are covered with beadwork of every description. Austere, all-white, art-for-art's sake turbans take their place alongside colorful headdresses adorned with whimsical creatures and elaborate patterns, designed for priests, heads of state, or the wealthy and fashionable. The museum shows mostly historical pieces, by artists who worked in what is now Nigeria. (The Studio Museum offers more contemporary versions, created by artists who have lived in various ports of the African diaspora.) (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10:30 to 5:30; Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Summer hours: unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Mondays through Fridays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

EUGENIE BAIZERMAN
Before she died of "psychosomatic asthma," in 1949, Baizerman produced a body of appealing modernist paintings, which have rarely been exhibited. Each small blizzard of bright color resolves, at a distance, into a prancing nude or a sober still-life. They don't exactly leave one breathless, but they radiate a principled innocence, aglow with hints of Cézanne and Seurat. Through July 28. (Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 752-1223.)

JOAQUIN TORRES-GARCIA
Packed with tidy icons—fish, snails, snakes, dogs, and dancing human figures—the best known canvases of this Uruguayan modernist suggest a hieroglyphic variant of Cubism. Though it's composed mostly of drawings, this show offers a thumbnail sketch of Torres-Garcia's development, from jaunty early images of harbors to his abstract works, which come in several geometric and pictographic varieties. The meaning of the images is sometimes murky, but their draftsmanship is as clear and joyful as Keith Haring's. Through July 29. (CDS, 76 E. 79th St. 772-9555.)

"SIX WOMEN ARTISTS"
The standout in this collection of works on paper is a group of Dorothea Rockburne's monoprints from the mid-nineties. Their formal premise is simple: Rockburne soaks yards of filament in color and then lays them down onto an inked plate. The results are Spirographic delights, tangles of line that call to mind Alphonse Mucha as much as Jackson Pollock. In a second group, Rockburne brusquely paints over the looping patterns, as if to banish any suspicion of preciousness. Other highlights include rarely seen watercolors by Eva Hesse and a lovely abbreviated charcoal drawing of Berkeley Square, in London, by Susan Crowder. Through Sept. 15. (Ganz, 25 E. 73rd St. 752-1223.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

HANS-PETER FELDMAN
Feldman has taken over this gallery, from the front window (where he has taped a sign that reads "Thank You") to the back hall (where he has stowed a collection of eleven left shoes, borrowed from gallery employees). Between them, he has written the complete lyrics of "Que Será Será" on the wall and provided a bed from which to contemplate the song's stoic message. The show also displays Feldman's usual product, photographs, in groups, including color laser prints of images "taken from hotel room windows while traveling" and a suspiciously small photo survey called "All the clothes of a woman"—all the clothes a specific woman took on vacation with him, perhaps. Through Aug. 11. (303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121.)

"TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY"
This group effort signals its tragic retro-hipness with the subtitle "It's only just begun." Affecting tributes to the artists' childhoods include Roe Etheridge's photographs: the best captures a kitchen refrigerator covered with legible magnets (one lists the appropriate salary for a housewife's services as $68,000) at the moment that a trotting dog enters the frame. Another set, "Andrew W.K." and "A Young Pine, Winter," is more didactic—the first depicts a young man whose face, neck, and chest are covered with blood, and the second a slim fir tree, whose baby-hair trunk needles are drying and browning as the mature branches grow thicker and greener. Spencer Sweeney's adjacent installation of a broken window—the offending brick lies on the floor and a fan inflates the curtains—loses strength as it gains specificity. As you approach, you can make out the curtains, which are made from eighties-era fabric printed with "Transformers" figures, and the brick is painted to read "Nerds!" Additional work by Tony Just, Wade Guyton, and Miss Sissel Kardel. Through July 28. (Gavin Brown's Enterprise, 436 W. 15th St. 627-5258.)

"00"
This well-chosen drawing show stands out among the welter of summer group exhibitions like a Prada bag among fanny packs. Participants range from the well known (Alex Katz, who contributes a spare and elegant drawing of his wife, Ada) to the unknown (winsome newcomer Jackie Saccoccia) to the all but forgotten (Photo-Realist Robert Bechtle). Of the hundred and twelve artists on view, only one really flouts the conventions of the medium, creating work that isn't installed directly on the wall: Rirkrit Tiravanija simply leans his creation—a picket sign, whose nearly illegible ransom-note-style lettering proclaims "Capitalism Isn't Working"—against the wall. Armchair curators might gripe about certain exclusions (where, for example, is Robert Gober?), but that would be nit-picking. The exhibition's thoughtful installation creates many unexpected pairings: who before this ever considered the mind-bending cosmologies of painter Matthew Ritchie in terms of Vito Acconci's whimsical populist playgrounds? Through Aug. 30. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 206-9300.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

RAOUL HAGUE
A friend of Arshile Gorky and Philip Guston, the Turkish-born Armenian-American sculptor (1905-1993) began carving abstract wood sculptures in the forties. The five examples here, mostly from the seventies, are mammoth tree trunks, carved and transformed into rippling biomorphic forms. Sensuous but not overpolished, they have a weighty, comical feel. "Dennemora," with its tapering neck, reads as a cross between an anvil and a giraffe. An untitled work from 1975 suggests a pair of unsteady legs. Henry Moore's work comes to mind, but Hague's pieces are bulkier, more mountainous, like modern dances performed by the overweight and middle-aged. Through Aug. 4. (Lennon Weinberg, 560 Broadway. 941-0012.)

"BUBBLES 'N BOXES 'N BEYOND"
What may sound like a Lawrence Welk tribute album is in fact a winning show of comic-book artists from Switzerland and North America. The installation is designed to shift the conventional two-dimensional comic-book layout (the boxes and bubbles of the title) into three dimensions, which it does by creating walls out of corrugated plastic to offer viewers a sin-

ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Shopping with Bugs, Mickey, and Shaq

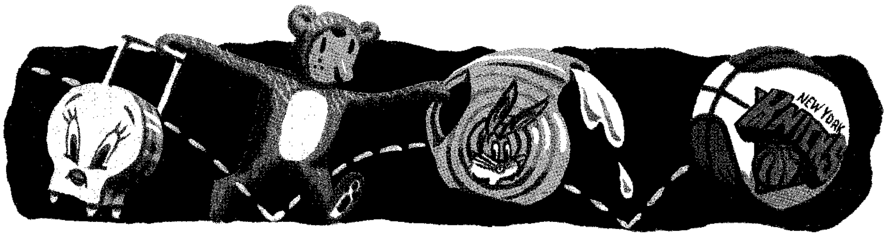
Dismay and disdain are not uncommon reactions to the corporate theme stores that have bullied their way onto Fifth Avenue. On the face of it, there appear to be plenty of reasons to avoid these places. They're invariably mobbed, especially in summer, and they like to slap logos on everything from charm bracelets to chess sets. Still, if you're willing to brave the din and the hordes—and if someone in your party is under ten, you may have no choice—you may be surprised at the clever, charming merchandise you'll find.

The **WARNER BROS. STUDIO STORE** (1 E. 57th St.; 840-4040) has a wide selection of appealing crockery, including a summer-house-worthy cerulean-blue water pitcher that is the image of vintage Fiestaware but for the subtle presence of a carrot-chomping Bugs Bunny ($28). Generously cut beachwear—dress ($32), baggy shorts ($24), and camp shirt ($28)—made of yellow-and-blue Hawaiian-print rayon features a grass-skirted Tweety Bird doing his best to survive on an island that looks a lot like Pulau Tiga, the remote setting of CBS's "Survivor." Tweety reappears as a bright-yellow suitcase on wheels, so winning it could persuade the youngest member of the family to handle his or her own baggage ($28).

A few blocks south, the **DISNEY STORE** (711 Fifth Ave.; 702-0702) has plenty of items that will attract the attention of smaller shoppers, including a life-size fake-fur bear costume (well, it's life-size if you're three) meant to facilitate impersonations of Jim Henson's Bear in the Big Blue House ($35). Significantly more expensive items await on the second floor, including a crystal-studded glass slipper that has been fitted with a clasp, strung on a long cord, and now stands ready to amuse a frisky party hopper with a Cinderella complex ($2,050). And that famous rodent who saved the Ingersoll-Waterbury Clock Company from bankruptcy sixty-seven years ago—Macy's sold eleven thousand Mickey Mouse watches on their first day of availability—still adorns many timepieces, including a miniature replica of the original watch ($16.95) and an updated version suspended from a beaded lariat ($19).

Both the Warner and Disney stores are filled with the shrieks of ecstatic—and miserable—children. By contrast, a visit to the **NBA STORE** (666 Fifth Ave.; 515-6221), which is filled with the soft thudding of basketballs, is almost soothing. The whole place is built around a Guggenheim-like ramp, and the lower level has a built-in court that invites customers to take their best shots. Though the basketball season is over, the store continues to peddle plenty of insignia-laden merchandise, from towels to mugs to baseball caps (which are, apparently, universal headgear, equally applicable to any sport). The foulard-silk ties with barely discernible baskets and balls would please fans stuck in the boardroom ($40). And there's familiar comfort to be had in the pigment-dyed, cotton-fleece pullovers, which are so faded that they seem to have been on the back porch since the Lakers played in Minneapolis ($45). For more rarefied tastes, a glass vitrine holds an old-fashioned powder compact ($250) that sports the same color scheme as the ruby, sapphire, and diamond case Cole Porter gave his wife, Linda, when "Red Hot and Blue" opened, in 1936. The stones here may be crystal and the metal far from platinum, but the fellow decorating the lid—a player dribbling a tiny, glittering ball—is as graceful as any Broadway hoofer.

—*Lynn Yaeger*



MICHAEL SLOAN

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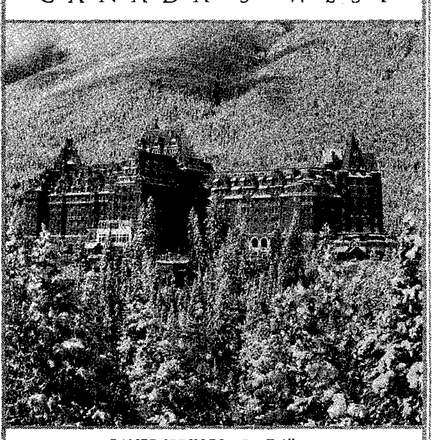

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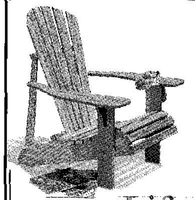

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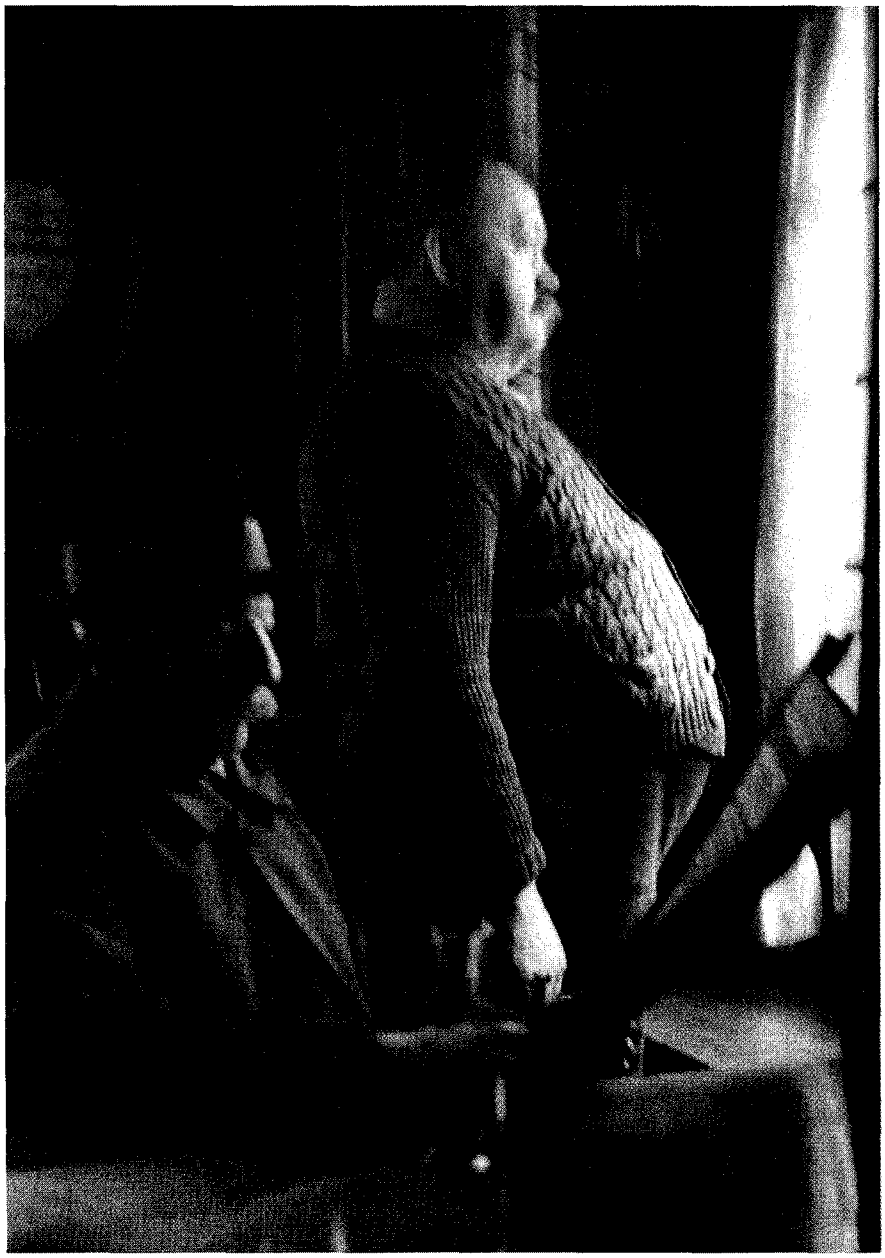
gle path through the gallery. The one piece not in this maze is a collaborative installation by Thomas Ott and Daniel Affolter that re-creates a filthy tenement apartment so persuasively that you may not want to enter for health reasons. Stained sheets, a pan of mystery meat, and a lenticular image of Christ share the hovel with a series of family portraits that in fact depict characters from Ott's mafioso comic book, "La Grande Famiglia." Through Aug. 19. (Swiss Institute, 495 Broadway. 925-2035.)

"SUMMER"
This group show specializes in colorful, crudely constructed sculptures with moving parts: a spinning wheel covered with fluorescent fur, several pieces with televisions, and one delightfully low-tech menagerie, courtesy of Bret Hammen. Hammen contributes a dog made from a mutt-shaped piece of wood and a remote-control truck, his nearby elephant figurine is dwarfed by the Victrola horn coming out of its trunk, and a chalk drawing of a buffalo on a blackboard is bracketed by a Walkman and portable speakers that play the artist's scratchy rendition of "Home on the Range." Additional work by Rolf Belgum, Tom Jarmusch, M. Henry Jones, Alfredo Martinez, and James Walsh. Through Aug. 4. (Donahue Sosinski, 560 Broadway. 226-1111.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

JAKOB TUGGENER
The Swiss photographer and filmmaker Jakob Tuggener (1904-1988) is one of the great but little-known precursors of Robert Frank's poetic realism: the two share a grainy technique and a casual observational style that proved tremendously influential. Steichen included a pair of Tuggener's photographs in his pivotal 1955 "Family of Man" exhibition at MOMA; surprisingly, this is Tuggener's first American solo show. It includes tight shots of workmen engrossed in their labor hanging alongside images of the messy glamour of grand hotel ballrooms and the simple curl of a pig's tail on a plate. Through Sept. 2. (Scalo, 560 Broadway. 334-9393.)



Jakob Tuggener's "Restaurant in November (Near Lenzburg)," at Scalo.

"ARCHITECTURAL CONSTRUCTS IN CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY"
How do you fit fifteen artists into a room less than thirty by thirty feet square? Limit them to one work each. The pictures on show here deal less with finished architectural products than with virtual and modelled spaces. Those few photographers who treat real structures shoot them at oblique angles, or alter their prints by collaging or drawing other elements in. Nic Nicosia's "Domestic Drama," a staged scene of a couple fighting bitterly over the blueprints of a new house, surrounded by workmen handling various stages of construction, reminds viewers that these abstract architectural diagrams have concrete consequences. Through Aug. 18. (Saul, 560 Broadway. 431-0747.)

"FAMILY TREE"
This group of family-focussed photos includes work by five artists, some pieces clearly stronger than others. Lois Guarino's montages and Laurent Millet's collages look cluttered compared to the simpler pictures on display. Pages from Karl Baden's photo-and-text journal of his wife's pregnancy and their baby's early days offer interesting reading matter, but seem inconsequential alongside his ongoing self-portrait project—a harshly flash-lit, passport-style photo every morning for the last thirteen years, three years of which are on show. On the bright side, literally, hanging near the windows, are Leo Rubinfien's large, close-up, black-and-white portraits of his infant daughter, who has the face of an ancient Catskills comedian, and Maria Meisenberger's early- and mid-nineties nude self-portraits and "somagrams." The latter are monoprints made with a home-brewed solution smeared onto Meisenberger's skin and transferred to paper through direct contact; they are framed under glass silk-screened with the Morse-code-like patterns of her DNA. Through Aug. 25. (Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave. 989-7600.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. (860-1777)—**"A Durable Memento"** presents daguerreotypes of places (Connecticut, Liberia) and people (John Brown) taken by Augustus Washington, the son of a former slave. Through Sept. 24. **"Positions in the Life World"** surveys Martha Rossler's photos and videos, including such classics as the 1979 "Semiotics of the Kitchen." Opening July 29. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

RUDY BURCKHARDT
De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave. 262-5050.
Through July 28.

ELLIOTT ERWITT
Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.
750-7070. Through Aug. 11.

W. EUGENE SMITH
Gallery 292, at 120 Wooster St.
431-0292. Through Aug. 12.

"AIR CONDITIONED: INTERIORS"
Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766.
Through Aug. 31.

"COMPENDIUM"
Sepia Gallery, 148 W. 24th St.
645-9444. Through July 29.

"SPIAGGE: THE BEACH"
De Lellis, 47 E. 68th St. 327-1482.
Through Sept. 9.

See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney Museum.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

ORCHESTRAS

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
The orchestra continues its free parks concerts. In the first week's programs, André Raphel Smith conducts Glinka's "Ruslan and Ludmila" Overture, Corigliano's "Elegy," Copland's "Four Dance Episodes from Rodeo," and Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5. (Cunningham Park, Queens. July 27 at 8. ♦ Miller Field, Gateway National Recreation Area, Staten Island. July 28 at 8. ♦ Heckscher State Park, East Islip, Long Island. July 29 at 8.) ♦ The second week opens as Mikko

Franck, a twenty-year-old Finn who is already well launched in his international conducting career, leads Bernstein's "Candide" Overture, Gershwin's "An American in Paris," Alexander Arutiunian's Trumpet Concerto (featuring the orchestra's principal trumpeter, Philip Smith), and Stravinsky's "Firebird" Suite (in the rarely played 1945 version). (Great Lawn, Central Park. Aug. 1 at 8.) (No tickets necessary for any of these parks concerts. Fireworks follow every performance. For rain-date information, call 875-5709.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY
Jens Nygaard leads Haydn's Symphony No. 24 and Albinoni's "San Marco" Trumpet Concerto (here in an arrangement for soprano saxophone, featuring Harvey Pittel), among other works. (45 Bleecker Theatre, 45 Bleecker St., at Lafayette St. July 31 at 8. For information about tickets, call 799-1259.)

MOSTLY MOZART
The evergreen summer celebration begins its thirty-fourth season, which continues through Aug. 26. July 31 at 8: In a free, outdoor, opening-night-eve concert, Gerard Schwarz and the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra invite as many people as can fit into Damrosch Park—and it is bound to be filled to overflowing—to listen to Mozart's Symphony No. 38 (the "Prague") and his Violin Concerto No. 3; the soloist is Jennifer Frautschi, who, having played the violin for all but the first three of her twenty-seven years, has been making an impressive climb through the competition and concert circuits. Also on the program are Beethoven's "Fidelio" Overture and Bizet's sparkling Symphony in C. (No tickets necessary.) ♦ Aug. 1-2 at 8: The "Prague" Symphony and the "Fidelio" Overture resurface, along with Mozart's F-Major Piano Concerto (K. 459, with Peter Serkin) and further excerpts from "Fidelio": the "Leonore" Overture No. 3 and several arias and duets featuring soprano Carol Vaness and tenor Vinson Cole. Mr. Schwarz again conducts the Festival Orchestra. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500.)

RECITALS

"MUSIC IN THE GARDEN"
In the final concert of the Church of the Holy Trinity's outdoor series, five singers offer arias and ensembles from "Lakmé," "Carmen," and other operas. (316 E. 88th St. July 26 at 7:15. Admission by contribution.)

ORFEO DUO
Trinity Church's "Make Mine Mozart" series continues as violinist Vita Wallace and pianist Ishmael Wallace perform two of the composer's sonatas. (Broadway at Wall St. July 27 at 1. No tickets necessary.)

BARGEMUSIC
Every season offers particular pleasures at New York's only floating concert hall. At the height of summer the evening concerts are irresistible: the panoramic windows that form the back of the barge's stage afford a view of the sun setting over the lower Manhattan skyline, to the accompaniment of mostly mainstream chamber music. July 27 at 7:30 and July 28 at 8: Violinist Mark Peskanov, violist Toby Hoffman, and cellist Nathaniel Rosen play Mozart's Divertimento in E-Flat Major (K. 563), and Paige Hoffman completes the ensemble for Brahms's C-Minor Piano Quartet. ♦ July 29 at 7:30 and July 30 at 4: Consider it a family affair with a visitor: the violinist Mark Peskanov, the soprano DeBorge Pinnington (his life partner), and the pianist Alexander Peskanov (his brother) are joined by Mr. Hoffman (just a good friend) for a recital that includes music by Mozart, Beethoven (his "Kreutzer" Violin Sonata), and Rachmaninoff. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061.)

BRONX ARTS ENSEMBLE
The organization presents harpsichordist Elaine Comparone and several other instrumentalists in free concerts of chamber music by Johann Sebastian Bach and his son Carl Philipp Emmanuel and by Alessandro Scarlatti and his son Domenico. (Rockwood Drive Circle, Van Cortlandt Park. July 30 at 2. In case of rain, this performance will take place at the Church of the Mediator, Kingsbridge Ave. at 231st St. ♦ McGinley Center, Fordham University, Bronx Rose Hill Campus. July 30 at 4.)

OUT OF TOWN

A selective listing of festival events within a reasonable drive from New York City.

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA
All four of this summer's productions are currently running in repertory. July 27 at 8 and Aug. 1 at 2: "La Bohème." ♦ July 28 at 8: "The Glass Blowers," a 1913 spoof of American jingoism by John Philip Sousa. ♦ July 29 at 8 and July 31 at 2: "Acis and Galatea," Handel's delightful pastoral, to a libretto by the literary lions John Gay, Alexander Pope, and John Hughes, based on Dryden's translation of Ovid. Handel introduced the piece in 1718 and

TABLES FOR TWO

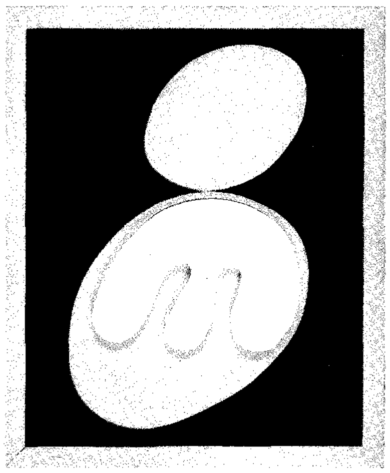
PEACOCK ALLEY
Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, 301 Park Ave. (872-4895)—Some of the most exciting food in the city is served at this elegant dowager, but where is everybody? Funereal music is piped into the oval-shaped room, which, despite the stripped-down décor, remains a glorious relic of the Nick-and-Nora era. The famous mural of preening albino peacocks is still here, but Cole Porter's piano has been moved to the lobby. A few exhausted hotel guests slouch in their chairs (all dressed in pink sports shirts, it seems; the jackets-required rule isn't enforced). And the waiters, although polite and professional, seem vaguely depressed. But resist the urge to bolt; those who stay will dine exceptionally well.

The chef, Laurent Gras, who took over in 1997, has done away with the appetizers-and-entrées routine and created a strange new game, the rules of which are explained to each baffled table. Each of the menu's two dozen dishes is filed under one of three topographic categories (Ocean/River, Forest/Field, and Farm) and assigned one of four mathematical labels: Intact (a raw ingredient with seasoning), Equal (two ingredients of equal power), Integral (one ingredient, garnished), and Amplify (a principal ingredient, enhanced by a strong note). Diners may pick dishes from any category, in any order.

All courses arrive under ornate silver domes, without pomp, as if everyone feasts this way all the time. "Would you like me to explain what you are eating?" the waiter asks, with hushed reverence for the chef's esoteric taxonomy, and it's easy to see why. Gras's approach yields graceful surprises: raw tuna wrapped in a roasted tomato, for instance, or a mound of ossetra on the freshest sea-bass carpaccio. The baby-spinach salad reveals white-truffle shavings, porcini, and an entire seared foie gras. And oysters on the half-shell arrive with a pitcher of caviar and crème fraiche.

Dessert is a five-course ordeal that starts with sorbet and a platter of petits fours (the best is a Lilliputian Key-lime pie). The sommelier, David Singer, who looks young enough to be a summer intern, clearly enjoys matching the erratic twists and turns of meals here with a full arsenal of half bottles. Chef Gras is a thirteen-year veteran of Alain Ducasse's voodoo, in Paris and Monte Carlo restaurants, and now that his notoriously exorbitant former boss has come to town, Peacock Alley seems like a bargain—and a luxurious one at that. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays for dinner, daily for breakfast. Prix fixe, $54-$89.)

—*Owen Phillips*



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Jean Arp. *Two Heads.* 1929. Gravure. Painted wood relief. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase. © 2000 ARS, N.Y./VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

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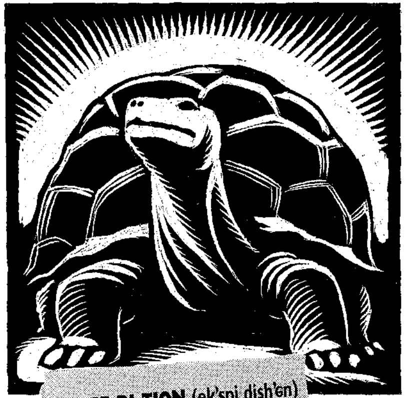

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made major revisions for a revival in 1732; Glimmerglass is doing the early version, whose slighter scale does seem better suited to the charming fancy of its subject. Leading the cast are soprano Christine Brandes (as Galatea, the nymph who longs for Acis), tenor John McVeigh (as Acis, whose love for Galatea is challenged by the giant Polyphemus), and baritone Dean Elzinga (as the giant, who crushes his rival under a rock but is outwitted when Galatea transforms the bleeding Acis into an unending stream in which she can swim). ♦ July 30 at 2: "Salome," featuring soprano Elizabeth Byrne, mezzo-soprano Robynne Redmon, and tenor Kenneth Riegel; conducted by Stewart Robertson. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255.)

TANGLEWOOD
July 27 at 8:30: Ida Haendel plays Bach's D-Minor Chaconne for Unaccompanied Violin and is joined by pianist Itamar Golan for Brahms's D-Minor Violin Sonata and pieces by Chausson, Szymanowski, and Wieniawski. ♦ July 28 at 8:30: James Conlon, the first in a succession of conductors overseeing the Boston Symphony Orchestra's concerts this week, leads an all-Mozart program, comprising the Symphonies No. 25 and No. 40 and the Piano Concerto in E-Flat Major (K. 482, with Emanuel Ax as the soloist). ♦ July 29 at 8:30: The French conductor Emmanuel Villaume directs works by his compatriots: Berlioz's "Benvenuto Cellini" Overture, Ravel's Piano Concerto in G (with Louis Lortie), and Franck's Symphony in D Minor. Franck, of course, wasn't really French but Walloon, but he was born in French-speaking Wallonia eight years before that region was subsumed into Belgium; when he was thirteen his family left Liège for Paris, and that's where he spent almost all of his life. Today, the French and the Belgians are both happy to claim him as their own. ♦ July 30 at 2:30: The next conductor up is Ilan Volkov, who leads the orchestra in Julian Anderson's "The Stations of the Sun," Mendelssohn's "The Fair Melusine" Overture, and Brahms's Piano Concerto No. 1 (featuring Daniel Barenboim). ♦ July 30-31 at 8: A full staging of Verdi's "Falstaff," with Seiji Ozawa conducting the advanced vocal and instrumental students of the Tanglewood Music Center. ♦ Aug. 1: Every summer, serious music lovers in the Berkshires let their hair down with the daylong "Tanglewood on Parade" festivities. This year, various entertainments take place beginning at 2, and at 8:30 the members of the Boston Symphony, the Boston Pops, and the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra team up for a concert, with Mr. Ozawa, John Williams, Keith Lockhart, and Robert Spano taking turns at the podium. A highlight of the concert is the screening of "The Unfinished Journey," a short film by Steven Spielberg about America at the turn of the twentieth century, with a score by Pops conductor-laureate Williams. In keeping with tradition, the evening concludes with Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture" (with real cannons in the battery) and a display of fireworks over the Stockbridge Bowl. (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200.)

CARAMOOR
July 28 at 6:30: The up-and-coming Avalon String Quartet, which is in residence at Caramoor this year, offers the première—and the second performance—of Augusta Read Thomas's "Fugitive Star," in addition to quartets by Mozart (in F Major, K. 590) and Brahms (in A Minor). The attractions are both musical and gustatory: the performances of the Mozart and the Thomas are followed by a buffet dinner, after which come remarks by Thomas, a reprise of the new piece, and the Brahms. ♦ July 29 at 2: An afternoon of jazz, featuring four groups; following a dinner break, the Cuban jazz pianist Chucho Valdés and his quintet pick up the proceedings at 8. ♦ July 30 at 4:30: Maximiano Valdés (no relation to Chucho) conducts the Orchestra of St. Luke's in Copland's "Appalachian Spring" Suite, Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 2 (featuring Leonidas Kavakos), and Haydn's Symphony No. 101 (the "Clock"). (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN
July 29 at 8: Jazz singer Ron Gill and his group. ♦ July 30 at 3: The Da Ponte String Quartet plays two quartets in C Major—by Mozart (K. 465, the "Dissonance") and Beethoven (Op. 59, No. 3)—as well as Dvořák's Piano Quintet (Op. 81, with Pamela Mia Paul assisting). (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS
July 29 at 8: Daniel Epstein, the pianist of the Raphael Trio, performs Beethoven's Sonata in D Major (Op. 10, No. 3), Copland's Piano Variations, a passel of Chopin, and two pieces by John Cage, "Two Pieces for Piano" (from 1947) and "4'33"." The latter, which is Cage's most renowned work, requires the performer, or performers, to make no noise for precisely four minutes and thirty-three seconds; the "music" is created by whatever accidental sounds happen to creep into the hush. Maverick Concerts débuted the piece in 1952, and has performed it occasionally over the years, most recently a decade ago. During that revival (for brass quintet), an elderly man in the audience loudly informed his wife, "That's it, it's about silence!" To which the wife responded, "Yes, you idiot, shut up!" ♦ July 30 at 3: The Tokyo String Quartet is joined by David Krakauer for Brahms's Clarinet Quintet, in a recital that also includes Mendelssohn's rarely played "Three Movements for String Quartet" (an unconnected group of items, two from the end of his life, collected for posthumous publication as his Op. 81) and Beethoven's "Grosse Fuge." (Woodstock, N.Y. 845-679-8217.)

SARATOGA PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
July 30 at 4: The cultural hot shots of turn-of-the-century Vienna flocked to Alma Schindler Mahler: apart from her marriages to the composer Gustav Mahler, the architect Walter Gropius, and the writer Franz Werfel, she shared her charms, more or less intimately, with the composer Alexander Zemlinsky and the painter Oskar Kokoschka before she fled Austria for America during the Second World War. It's the stuff of movies—and, in fact, Paramount Classics intends to release a bio-pic about her, filmed on location in Vienna, later this year. The Saratoga Chamber Music Festival opens with a program that includes a selection of her songs, in addition to chamber works by two of her early suitors: Zemlinsky's Piano Trio and Mahler's Piano Quartet. ♦ Aug. 1 at 8:15: Violinist Chantal Juillet and pianist Lowell Liebermann perform the latter's Violin Sonata; André Watts takes over the keyboard for Mozart's Piano-and-Winds Quintet and Schubert's "Trout" Quintet. (Saratoga Springs, N.Y. 518-587-3330.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

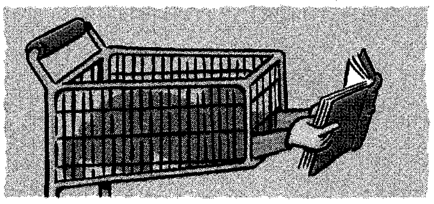
READINGS
July 27 at 7:30: By poets Jenny Badman and Robin Beth Schaer and authors Jesse Dorris and David Levinson. (halcyon, 227 Smith St., Brooklyn. No tickets necessary.) ♦ July 30 at 7:30: By Jeffrey Renard Allen, from his novel, "Rails Under My Back," in which two young African-American men recount their families' experiences of the past fifty years. (Temple Bar, 332 Lafayette St. No tickets necessary.)

TALKS
July 26 at 7: Rob Liflander, author of "The Everything Online Business Book," explains how to start a dot-com company. (Barnes & Noble, 290 Baychester Ave., the Bronx. No tickets necessary.) ♦ July 26 at 7:30: Authors Stanley Aronowitz, Seth Tobacman, and Michael Zezima and editor Sander Hicks debate the ultra-patriotic assumptions Zezima raises in his book, "Saving Private Power." (The Brecht Forum, 122 W. 27th St. For more information, call 242-4201.) ♦ July 30 at 2: Professor Michele H. Bogart discusses "Maxfield Parrish, Norman Rockwell, and 'Popular' Artwork in Twentieth-Century America." (Brooklyn Museum of Art, 200 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn. For more information, call 718-638-5000.)

WALKS
July 27 at 6:30: Discover the cultural and architectural riches of Harlem on a tour sponsored by the Museum of the City of New York and the Whitney. (For more information, call 534-1672, ext. 207.) ♦ July 30 at 1: Explore a hundred and fifty years of Jewish settlement on the Lower East Side. (For more information, call 439-1090.)

BOOK CURRENTS

Shop Talk



Almost two centuries before superstores, E-commerce, and the Home Shopping Network, Tocqueville observed that the American citizenry's desire for material happiness "perturbs their minds, but it disciplines their lives." A new set of books examines the mental perturbations caused by our consumer culture.

In **DO AMERICANS SHOP TOO MUCH?** (Beacon), a collection of essays by a dozen market-watchers, the economist Juliet Schor argues that while Americans once measured their success against that of their neighbors they now struggle to match the standards set by television sitcoms: "trophy homes, diamonds of a carat or more, granite countertops, and sport utility vehicles." Schor calls this trend "competitive consumption" and maintains that it imperils the American way of life. Others believe that it *is* the American way of life. In **WHY WE BUY** (Touchstone), the "retail anthropologist" Paco Underhill boasts that the late twentieth century has seen "more shopping than has ever taken place anywhere at any time." Rather than deplore this state of affairs, Underhill celebrates it, noting that if we "bought only what we needed, the economy would collapse, boom."

The culture critic Daniel Harris takes a less patriotic attitude toward capitalistic appetites. In **CUTE, QUAINT, HUNGRY AND ROMANTIC** (Basic), he argues that the public has swallowed the dubious notion that certain commercial products confer happiness and even spiritual well-being. When people buy protein shakes, he argues, they don't do it because they crave B-complex vitamins, but because they believe that the drinks are "miraculous panaceas for a world suffering from the chronic fatigue of ever-more-stressful jobs." Tocqueville might have agreed with Harris that Americans, more than any other people, suffer from "the extraordinary misconception that shopping is a profoundly self-creative act."

—*Liesl Schillinger*

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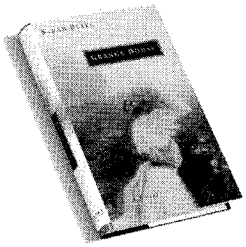

GRANGE HOUSE

by Sarah Blake

In 1898, the gruesome discovery of two drowned lovers sets the somber tone for a series of events that mark Maisie's seventeenth summer at the Grange House, a hotel resting on an island off the coast of Maine. As she contemplates the attentions of two wildly different young men, Maisie also falls under the hypnotic pull of the enigmatic Miss Grange, whose nostalgic stories may be fact or fiction. Another death and a ghostly apparition add to the suspense and intrigue, and play a part in changing Maisie's life forever. (Picador)

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A CERTAIN AGE

by Tama Janowitz

With trademark insight and sardonic wit, the bestselling author of *Slaves of New York* tackles the dilemma of being not-so-young, single and female in New York. After her friend's husband hits on her during a disastrous Hamptons weekend, auction house assistant Florence Collins realizes that time is running out in her desperate search for a high society husband of her own. (Anchor Books)

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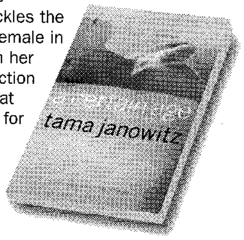

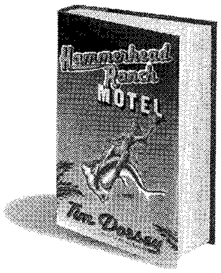

HAMMERHEAD RANCH MOTEL

by Tim Dorsey

In the sequel to his raucous and rollicking *Florida Roadkill*, author Tim Dorsey banishes serial killer Serge Stormes to a down-and-out Gulf Coast motel where he hopes to reclaim $5 million in laundered drug money. As a hurricane rages outside, Serge, his sleazy new sidekick and assorted local derelicts ride it out in the motel bar where a big time storm of another kind is brewing. (Morrow)

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A LITTLE LOVE

by C. C. Medina

This fun, witty tale follows the lives of four Latina women living in Miami as they pursue love, happiness and independence in a world of conflicting demands and shifting boundaries. While maintaining their respective identities, the women's distinct personalities are interwoven in a friendship that both combats and celebrates their vibrant, spirited culture. (Warner Books)

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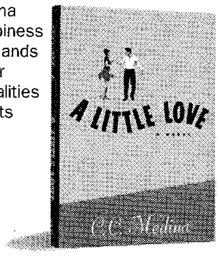

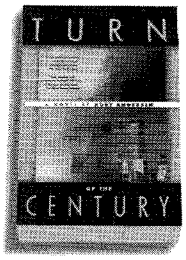

TURN OF THE CENTURY

by Kurt Andersen

Software entrepreneur Lizzie Zimbalist and network TV producer George Mactier live the trendy life of a power couple accelerating smoothly through today's capitalist Manhattan. But when a huge deal puts Lizzie in close contact with George's billionaire boss, a large dose of reality and a bit of humor reveal that even in an era of greed and temptation, money can't buy it all. (Delta)

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MIDNIGHT CHAMPAGNE

by A. Manette Ansay

In this enchanting tale of love and compromise, acclaimed author A. Manette Ansay skillfully weaves together the stories of two couples, one joyously united in marriage and another tragically affected by death. With great tenderness, passion and clarity, the power of love and all its intricacies are explored in full. (HarperPerennial)

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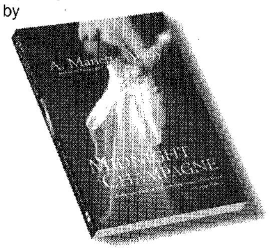

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MOVIES OPENING

GIRL ON THE BRIDGE
A love story directed by Patrice Leconte, in which Vanessa Paradis plays a suicidal woman who becomes the human target for a knife thrower. In French. Opening July 28.

NEW WATERFORD GIRL
Mooney (Liane Balaban), a fifteen-year-old Catholic girl, pretends she's pregnant in an attempt to escape her sleepy Cape Breton town. Directed by Allan Moyle. Opening July 26. (Film Forum.)

NUTTY PROFESSOR II: THE KLUMPS
In this sequel to the 1996 comedy, Eddie Murphy returns as Sherman Klump, and as Mama, Papa, Grandma, and nephew Ernie Klump. Directed by Peter Segal. Opening July 28.

THOMAS AND THE MAGIC RAILROAD
An adaptation of the popular children's television program "Thomas the Tank Engine and Friends," with Peter Fonda and Alec Baldwin. Directed by Britt Allcroft. Opening July 26.

THE WIND WILL CARRY US
A man from Teheran travels to a remote Kurdistan village for a mysterious purpose, in this drama written and directed by Abbas Kiarostami. In Farsi. Opening July 28.

WONDERLAND
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening July 28.

FILM NOTES

If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.

ALICE AND MARTIN
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

BENJAMIN SMOKE
This documentary, a requiem for the singer-songwriter Benjamin (a.k.a. Robert Dickerson) of the band Smoke, has the funereal gloom of a great Lou Reed record. The filmmakers, Jem Cohen and Peter Sillen, weave Benjamin's story—his impoverished life in Cabbagetown (a former mill town that's now part of Atlanta), his Southern drag-queen demeanor, his pill-popping, his struggle with AIDS—into a ragged tapestry of a talented life in extreme situations. Benjamin's face is a junkie rock star's dream (it has shades of Mick Jagger, David Johansen, and Steven Tyler), and his vocal delivery echoes Tom Waits and John Cale. What the directors get exactly right are the details of Benjamin's world: the damaged photographs, the graying shingled houses, and the cut and bruised townspeople. It's no surprise when Patti Smith shows up at the end of the film with a poem she's written for him.—*Bruce Diones* (The Screening Room.)

BUT I'M A CHEERLEADER
Natasha Lyonne—who stars in this O.K. comedy about a group of unfortunate gay teens at a "deprogramming" camp determined to "heterosexualize" them—certainly doesn't have the right people working for her. If she did, her agent and manager would realize what Lyonne should be doing: developing a bio-pic about the late, great comedienne Judy Holliday. Lyonne has the same impeccable timing, the same intelligence, and the same "How did I get here?" expression, which immediately overwhelms every movie she's in, including this one.—*Hilton Als* (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, and Empire 25.)

BUTTERFLY
In a small Spanish town, just before the outbreak of the Civil War, in 1936, an asthmatic little boy falls under the spell of a marvellous old teacher with republican sympathies. Director José Luis Cuerda's charmer, set in the Galicia region, doesn't press its themes. The boy learns to love nature; his older brother undergoes a sexual awakening; the fierce discordancies of the war years gather slowly under the idyllic surface of the film. The exquisite, hard-focus cinematography (your eyesight seems to improve as you watch the movie) is by Javier G. Salmones. With the imposing, gravel-voiced Fernando Fernán Gómez as the teacher and Manuel Lozano as the boy.—*David Denby* (Angelika Film Center and Paris.)

CHICKEN RUN
A full-length exercise in stop-motion animation, but don't be scared. Nick Park improved the world with the introduction of the master-and-dog comedy duo Wallace and Gromit; now, in fellowship with Peter Lord, he has turned to chickens. Our heroines are hens, living claw-to-beak on a repressive farm, whose owner plans to switch from egg production to chicken potpies. Enter a roaming rooster named Rocky, pumped with American cheer and graced with the voice of Mel Gibson. He will lead the ladies over the wire to pastures new. The result is bright and inventive, though it lacks the snap of earlier Park productions.—*Anthony Lane* (7/10/00) (Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

CHUCK & BUCK
Chuck and Buck were lovers when they were eleven, and some sixteen years later Chuck (Chris Weitz) has become a sleek, soon-to-be-married, Los Angeles record producer, while Buck (Mike White) has spent the intervening years obsessed with his boyhood friend. He shows up in Los Angeles and pursues Chuck, spying on him at work and at home. Buck is supposed to be a voyeuristic creep, but a saintly creep—a true innocent in love. Shot in digital video, the picture lacks the scale and detail of a real movie. It feels clammy and claustrophobic, and it's filled with closeups of the two actors, both of whom are open-mouthed and dim.—*D.D.* (7/24/00) (Angelika Film Center.)

THE DECALOGUE
In 1988 and 1989, the Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski made a series of ten films for Polish television, in which each movie, roughly an hour in length, was devoted to one of the Ten Commandments. The films, set largely around an apartment complex in Warsaw, are not so much literal illustrations of the commandments as fables inspired by them—very modern fables, it turns out, featuring relations between men and women, and parents and children, of a depth and intensity not seen since Ingmar Bergman stopped making movies in the early eighties.—*D.D.* (6/12/00) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

DISNEY'S THE KID
The grotesque title should tell you part of what's wrong. For the first half hour, the talented screenwriter Audrey Wells provides good, nasty dialogue for Bruce Willis, a self-dissatisfied Los Angeles image consultant who puts everyone else down. But this movie, whimsically directed by Jon Turteltaub, quickly turns into a limp fantasy of self-recognition—a therapy dream.—*D.D.* (7/17/00) (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema II, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Village East Cinemas.)

EXOTICA
A mysterious search through tall grass; a strip joint where the girls weave, untouchable, in front of the customers; a pet store drowning in hot green light: yes, it's the world according to Atom Egoyan. This picture sidles along in the tranquillized, deadpan manner that he cultivated in "Family Viewing" and "The Adjuster." His fans believe that this style hooks into the secret, subterranean rhythms of society (if any director could do justice to Don DeLillo, it's Egoyan); the rest of us may suspect that there's less going on here than meets, and seduces, the eye. The actors have to flatten their performances to match the weirdness—the occasional trill of guilt and rage feels about as spontaneous as an alarm clock.—*A.L.* (BAM Rose Cinemas; July 30.)

LA GRANDE ILLUSION
In form, "La Grande Illusion" is an escape story, yet who would think of it in this way? It's like saying that "Oedipus Rex" is a detective story. Among other things, this 1937 film is a study of human needs and the subtle barriers of class among a group of prisoners and their captors during the First World War. The German prison commander von Rauffenstein (Erich von Stroheim) and his prisoner the French officer de Boeldieu (Pierre Fresnay) share a common world of memories and sentiments. Though their class is doomed by the changes that produced the war, they must act out the rituals of noblesse oblige and serve a nationalism they don't believe in. Jean Renoir directed this elegy for the death of the old European aristocracy, and it is one of the true masterpieces of the screen.—*Pauline Kael* (American Museum of the Moving Image; July 29-30.)

JESUS' SON
The new Alison Maclean film, adapted from the short stories of Denis Johnson, is her first offering since "Crush," and it maintains her careful interest in careless lives. Billy Crudup, who gets more interesting with every movie, plays a chronic drifter. He falls in love, roughly speaking, with a junkie (Samantha Morton); some of their scenes together are hard to watch, but Maclean's direction is more tender than indulgent, and the movie grips hardest when times are most raw. As the mood lifts and lightens in the second half, the blaze of the film dies down. Still, not since Robert Altman turned his attention to Raymond Carver has a director seemed so determined to master the ramshackle.—*A.L.* (State and Union Square.)

LOSER
Jason Biggs, the boy who had an encounter with a pastry in "American Pie," and Mena Suvari, who wanted to be perfect in "American Beauty," get matched up in a minor but pleasing college-romance movie. Jason is an earnest fellow victimized by cheating undergraduate louts; Mena is a tough cookie, working her way through school, who has an affair with a smarmy young literature professor (Greg Kinnear). Except for the two heroes, everyone is caricatured (Kinnear is no better than a sitcom sleazebag), but some of the flip college idiom devised by writer-director Amy Heckerling is amusing, and the young stars, as they fumble their way to love, are often charming together. A movie for the tenderhearted only. Shot in the area around New York University.—*D.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Union Square.)

ME, MYSELF & IRENE
In the latest gross-out comedy by the Farrelly brothers, Jim Carrey, a mild-mannered Rhode Island state trooper, represses so many hostile impulses that his personality splits in two—a new man pops out of him, a guy with a low bedroom voice and cool panther moves. Switching back and forth between the two characters, Carrey performs miracles with his face, teeth, groin, and elbows, but the switches are so frequent and arbitrary that Renée Zellweger, his charming co-star, doesn't have the time or the space to work up a coherent response to either man. The movie fails as romantic comedy and as narrative; it starts and stops, and after a while you forget why anyone is doing anything.—*D.D.* (7/3/00) (Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Union Square.)

THE PATRIOT
A square but stirring epic about the Revolutionary War. Benjamin Martin (Mel Gibson), a South Carolinian who's a war lover hiding as a man of peace,

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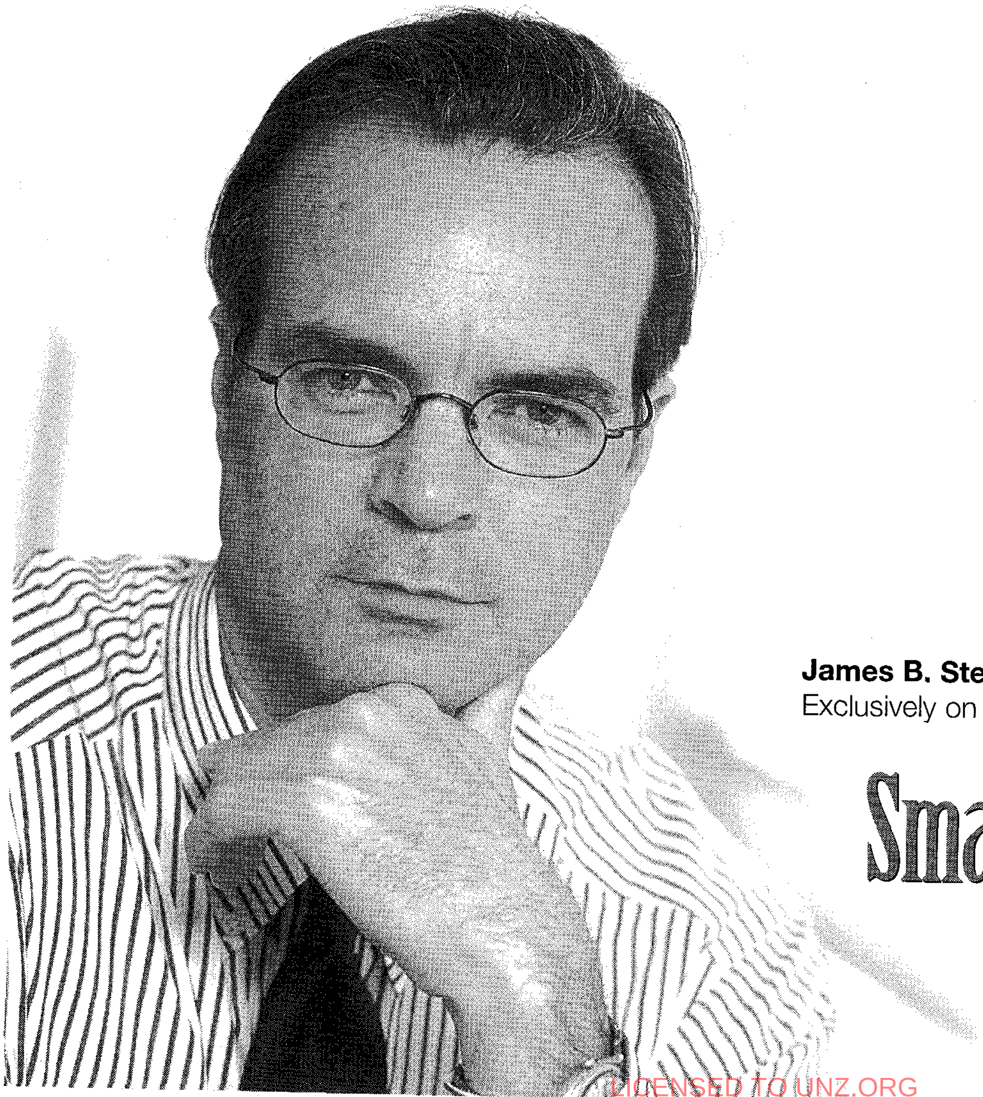

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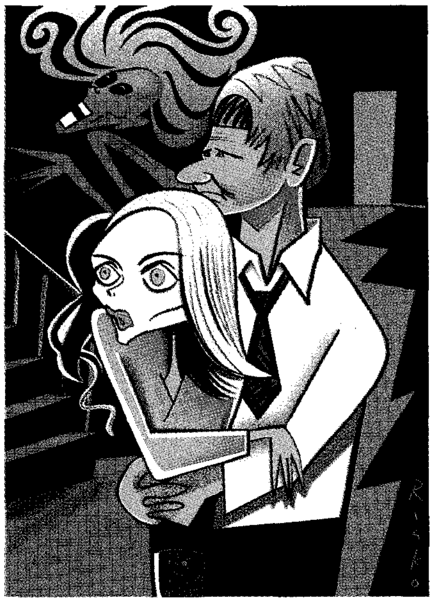
goes into action when the British execute one of his sons. Martin refuses to play by the standard rules of warfare; he organizes a guerrilla force that attacks out of the swamps. In response, the British commander, General Cornwallis (Tom Wilkinson), unleashes a sadistic subordinate, Colonel William Tavington (Jason Isaacs), who makes war against the American civilian population. At this point, the movie seems to jump right over the nineteenth century into the twentieth. We get ambushes, swordplay, skirmishes, battles, and family scenes, all generally well staged, with gravity and power, by the director Roland Emmerich.—*D.D.* (7/3/00) (Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, Union Square, and Waverly 1 and 2.)

THE PERFECT STORM

Man against the elements. Man is represented by George Clooney, which seems pretty flattering to the rest of us; he plays Billy Tyne, the captain of a fishing boat that set out from Gloucester, Massachusetts, in the fall of 1991. The elements are represented by a tempest of Shakespearean ferocity, although the Prospero in question was Industrial Light and Magic. What we see are humans being dwarfed by digital waves: a parable for our time. The story, based on Sebastian Junger's book, is true to life, give or take a few nautical miles and a bunch of dead dialogue, most of which goes to the women—headed by a weepy Diane Lane—left behind onshore. The screenwriter, Bill Wittliff, bends over backward to enliven the crew's relationships, but he basically falls overboard. For all the swell and spray, Wolfgang Petersen, the director, hasn't much to cling to here. Junger's book, which was crammed with great stuff about gales and gutting, was perhaps not as adaptable as Hollywood liked to think.—*A.L.* (7/10/00) (Coronet Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

RIFIFI

A quartet of thieves breaks into a jewelry store, and for a tense half hour we watch as they work, silently. The film is like a highly skilled documentary on how to disconnect a burglar alarm and open a safe, and it is thoroughly engrossing, because we see the criminals as craftsmen, and we celebrate their teamwork, their finesse, their triumph. Ironically, we find ourselves sympathizing with their honest exhaustion after their dishonest labor. From there on, this 1955 movie, made in France, by the American director Jules Dassin, follows the tradition of "Scarface," "Public Enemy," and "The Asphalt Jungle" (and of "Macbeth" before them), bringing the tragic, trapped figures to a cadaverous finish. Along the way, Dassin keeps things actively vicious, with glimpses of underworld prostitutes and hopheads and a murder, a kidnapping, and the thrashing of a faithless mistress, who is stripped. "Rififi" is the granddaddy of a batch of suspense films featuring how to knock over safes or break into banks and museums, but its own chief distinction is its nasty tone. In French.—*P.K.* (Film Forum.)



Michelle Pfeiffer and Harrison Ford in "What Lies Beneath."

SANS SOLEIL

The auteur behind this poetic 1982 documentary collage is Chris Marker, the innovative Frenchman best known here for "La Jetée" and "The Koumiko Mystery." It's what an avant-garde film should be: funny, scary, and intellectually exhilarating. Sandor Krasna, a cinematographer, wanders through Africa and Japan, seeking out the root beliefs and rituals that help people feel part of a natural historical continuity, even in an advanced, technological age. The title comes from Krasna's dream of making a sci-fi movie about a forty-first-century man who wrestles with the meaning of Mussorgsky's "Sunless" song cycle, which still exists but is no longer comprehensible. As in his other films, Marker, like his alter ego Krasna, is trying to elucidate the cascade of memories, reflexes, and stimuli that compose a particular cultural moment. His montage of Japanese rail travellers and the violent, sexy, silly cartoon and movie images that flit through their brains is the most limpid and mind-expanding evocation you're likely to see of fragmented contemporary consciousness. In French.—*Michael Sragow* (BAM Rose Cinemas; July 31.)

SCARY MOVIE

What makes this film a better than average sendup of the "Scream" genre of horror flick is its subtext: a black director, Keenen Ivory Wayans (the most visible member of the hilarious Wayans clan), has made an amiable farce of a movie that also shows what white fear onscreen looks like to a black audience: another example of white privilege. In one scene, the heroine, who is being stalked in her own home, pauses long enough to send an E-mail to her local police department which reads, "White woman in trouble." Seconds later, the police arrive. It's a visualization of an old Richard Pryor joke that hasn't gone stale because it's still true, even in the world outside movie theatres.—*H.A.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, Cinema 3rd Avenue, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Waverly 1 and 2.)

SHOWER

In this lovely independent movie from China directed by Zhang Yang, a modern young fellow eager to make money comes home to the shabby Beijing neighborhood in which he grew up. At first, Da Ming (Pu Cun Xin) feels nothing but fear and disgust. He's bored by his elderly dad, who runs a musty old bathhouse, and frightened by his retarded brother, who loves the father and works happily amid the damp tiles. Groaning and complaining, men arrive every day to seek solace—the warmth of moisture, the laying on of hands. As far as Da Ming is concerned, the bathhouse is a home for the living dead, but he soon gets drawn into the lulling rhythm of the place, and so do we. "Shower" is all about people taking care of one another, and, as such, its mood is bittersweet, since caring opens one to the pleasures of family love but also to the pain of disappointment.—*D.D.* (7/17/00) (Eastside Playhouse, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.)

SUNSHINE

Stiff but continuously interesting and touching. The Hungarian director István Szabó, working with the American writer Israel Horovitz, uses the rise and fall of a large Jewish bourgeois family as the prism through which to view the last hundred years of Hungarian life. Ralph Fiennes plays the young man of the family in three successive generations—a patriotic judge, a champion fencer who is felled by anti-Semitism (in the film's best section), and an Auschwitz survivor who becomes a police interrogator in the Communist dictatorship. At its worst, the movie offers the slightly dolorous pleasures of leafing through a family photo album; at its best, it's exciting and heartbreaking, and it leaves an American viewer grateful for our banal but stable democracy.—*D.D.* (7/17/00) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, 72nd Street East, and Union Square.)

WATER DROPS ON BURNING ROCKS

François Ozon, one of the better directors to come out of France in recent years, stumbles with this adaptation of a cheesy Fassbinder play. It's the typical Fassbinder setup—an older man seduces a younger innocent with disastrous results. The film takes place in an apartment, and Ozon does a good job at sustaining a decent, interesting rhythm in cramped quarters, but the characters drag out their empty behavior past tolerance. In French.—*B.D.* (Film Forum.)

WHAT LIES BENEATH

A bag of reliable old tricks. In a beautiful lakeside house in Vermont, Michelle Pfeiffer quivers in terror as an insistent ghost plays tricks on her—opening doors, knocking over pictures, squirting toothpaste into her coffee. Robert Zemeckis, the director, even resorts to horror-movie standbys such as having a menacing person suddenly appear in the frame as Pfeiffer scans her surroundings with a pair of binoculars. The cinematography, by Don Burgess, is chastely beautiful, but the music, by Alan Silvestri, tears into your emotions with the violence of a rusty blade wielded by a maniac. Most of screenwriter Clark Gregg's dialogue is banal, and Harrison Ford, as Pfeiffer's husband, scowls in selfish indifference to her problems. The picture is effectively scary, at times unpleasantly so, but only in the last forty minutes—especially during a sequence in a bathtub—does it rise above cliché.—*D.D.* (Astor Plaza, Kips Bay Theatre, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

X-MEN

The most beautiful, strange, and exciting comic-book movie since the original "Batman." The world, it seems, is filled with mutants—quirks of evolution and lost souls who band together for comfort and understanding. Feared by the regular humans, the mutants, according to Magneto (Sir Ian McKellen), will never be accepted, and since they are superior he believes they should either destroy the rest of humanity or supplant it. He's been engaged in a long quarrel about this with Professor Xavier (Patrick Stewart), a soft-spoken, wheelchair-bound sage with empathic powers. The film combines the fear of aliens invading us (an old sci-fi trope) with a spectacular war of the gods. The director, Bryan Singer, builds the characters and then lets the action flow from their special physical skills. With Hugh Jackman as the anguished warrior Wolverine; Anna Paquin as Rogue, a teen-ager who tries to make out with her nonmutant boyfriend and winds up putting him in a coma; and Rebecca Romijn-Stamos as Mystique, who can morph into anything, but whose preferred form seems to be a stunning nude blue silicon torso.—*D.D.* (7/24/00) (Chelsea Cinemas, Chelsea West, Empire 25, Murray Hill Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, Village East Cinemas, and Ziegfeld.)

ALSO PLAYING

CROUPIER
BAM Rose Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and The Screening Room.

THE FILTH AND THE FURY (4/3/00)
Art Greenwich Twin and Pioneer.

GLADIATOR (5/8/00)
Art Greenwich Twin, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.

HAMLET (5/15/00)
Gotham Cinema.

M:I-2 (6/5/00)
84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Sutton 1 and 2, and Village Theatre VII.

SHAFT (7/3/00)
84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.

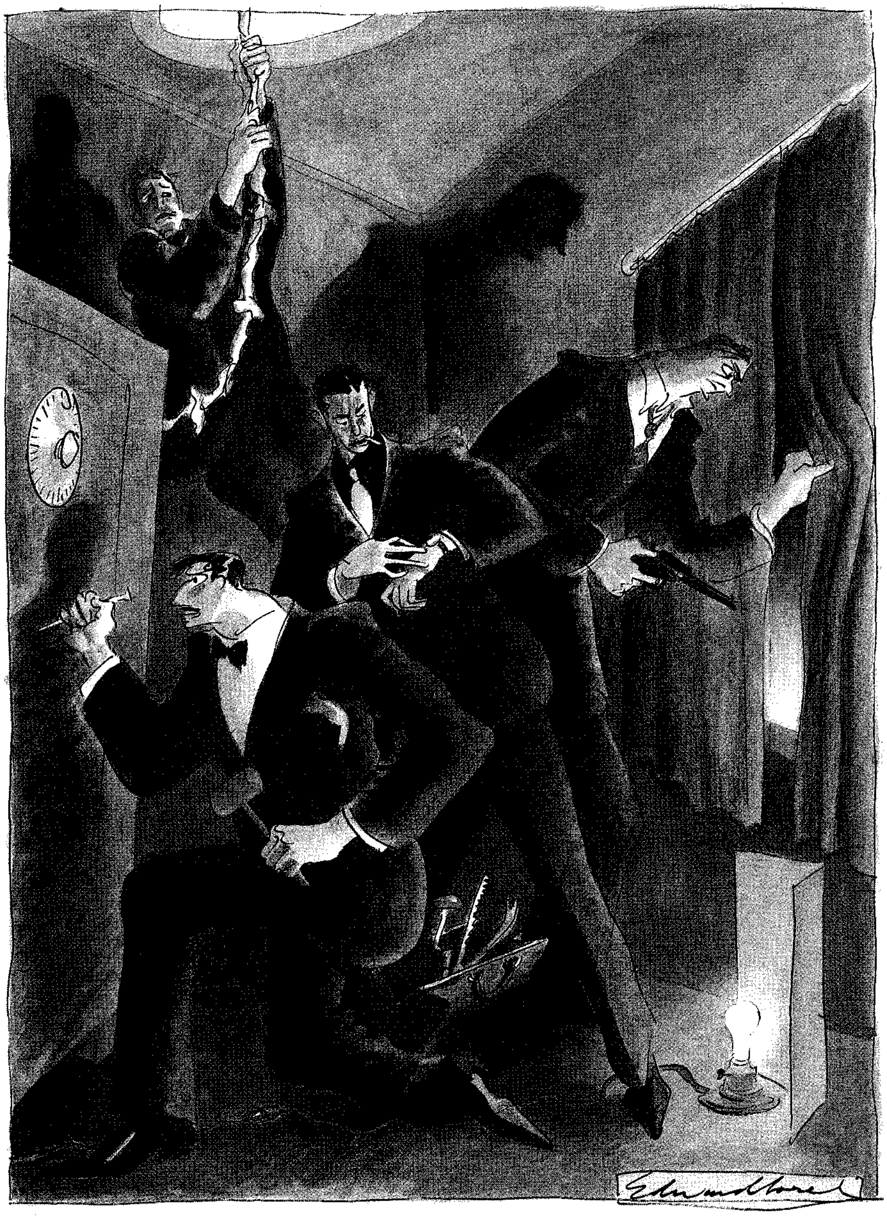
TIME REGAINED (6/19 & 6/26/00)
Cinema Village.

ROBERT RISKO

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.



A twenty-eight-minute sequence depicting a perfectly executed jewel heist forms the centerpiece of Jules Dassin's 1955 noir masterwork, "Rififi," showing at Film Forum.

EDWARD SOREL

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Sept. 3: "Behind the Mirror," a series of films that portray the darker side of the fifties. July 29 at 2: "The Bad and the Beautiful" (1952, Vincente Minnelli). ♦ July 29 at 4:15: "Some Came Running" (1958, Minnelli). ♦ July 30 at 2: "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" (1956, Don Siegel). ♦ July 30 at 4: "Them!" (1954, Gordon Douglas). ♦ Classic movies. July 29-30 at 6:30: "La Grande Illusion" (†).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—"Summer's a Drag," two films featuring drag queens, presented as part of Queer Filmmakers 2000. July 26 at 7: "Battle for the Tiara" (1999, Eric Schiff and Charley Lang). ♦ July 26 at 8: "Franchesca Page" (1996, Kelley Sane). ♦ Music documentaries. July 27 at 7, July 28 at 9:30, and July 30 at 7: "Listening to You: The Who at the Isle of Wight Festival" (1970, Murray Lerner). ♦ July 27 at 9, July 28 at 11:30, and July 29 at 5: "Monterey Pop" (1969, D. A. Pennebaker) ♦ July 28 at 7: "Wattstax" (1973, Mel Stuart). ♦ July 29 at 7 and July 30 at 5: "Jazz on a Summer's Day 1959" (1959, Bert Stern). ♦ July 29 at 9 and July 30 at 9: "Thelonious Monk: Straight, No Chaser" (1988, Charlotte Zwerin and Christian Blackwood).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—July 26 at 8: "Scarface: The Shame of a Nation" (1932, Howard Hawks). ♦ July 27 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "The Garden of the Finzi-Continis" (1970, Vittorio De Sica; in Italian). ♦ July 28 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Fargo" (1996, Joel Coen). ♦ July 29 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:40: "Dead Man" (1995, Jim Jarmusch). ♦ July 30 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Exotica" (†). ♦ July 31 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Sans Soleil" (†).

BRYANT PARK
Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. (521-5700)—Mondays, starting at dusk: free drive-in-style moviegoing. July 31: "Pillow Talk" (Michael Gordon, 1959).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—"First Run Features: A Retrospective, 1979-2000." July 27 at 6: "The Personals" (2000, Chen Kuo-fu; in Mandarin). ♦ July 28 at 2:30 and July 31 at 6: "Leila" (1997, Dariush Mehruji; in Farsi). ♦ July 28 at 6: "No Fear, No Die" (1990, Claire Denis; in French). ♦ July 28 at 8 and July 31 at 2:30: "Insomnia" (1997, Erik Skjoldbjaerg; in Norwegian). ♦ July 29 at 2: "The Disenchanted" (1990, Benoît Jacquot; in French). ♦ July 29 at 5: "The Watermelon Woman" (1997, Cheryl Dunye). ♦ July 30 at 2: "Strangers in Good Company" (1990, Cynthia Scott). ♦ July 30 at 5: "I, the Worst of All" (1990, María Luisa Bemberg; in Spanish).

MUSEUM OF TELEVISION AND RADIO
25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—Through Sept. 17: "The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle and Friends," a retrospective of the classic cartoon. Tuesdays through Sundays at 12:15, Thursdays at 6, and Fridays at 7.

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—July 28-August 8: "Celebrating Philippine Cinema: New Directions 2000." All films are in Tagalog with English subtitles. July 28 at 7, July 29 at 8:45, and July 30 at 3:30: "Naked Under the Moon" (1999, Lav Diaz). ♦ July 29 at 1:15 and 6:30 and July 30 at 8: "Lea's Story" (1999, Chito S. Roño). ♦ July 29 at 3:45 and July 31 at 4 and 8:45: "The Criminal of Barrio Concepcion" (1999, Diaz). ♦ July 30 at 1:15 and 6 and July 31 at 6:40: "The Story of Ah" (1998, Joel C. Lamangan).

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THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

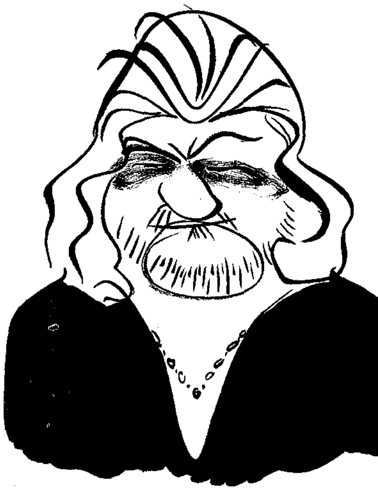
COMMENT
BASEST INSTINCTS

In certain areas along the margins of the city, the carcasses of a number of dead crows have lately been found to be infected with a dangerous pathogen, the West Nile virus. In response, an extensive program of spraying is currently under way. The insecticides involved are environmentally unwholesome, but they have the salutary effect of reducing the population of mosquitoes, along with their annoying buzz.

The authorities are helpless to intervene in the bookstores, however, and, last week, the buzz there reached terrifying proportions. Most of it was being generated on behalf of "American Rhapsody," by Joe Eszterhas, the scenarist responsible for a dozen or so movies ranging from the bad to the less bad and including "F.I.S.T.," "Basic Instinct," "Jade," and "Showgirls." The practice of giving a book a short title keyed to the adjective "American" is a common publishing strategy. Its purpose is to lend an air of moral weight, and sometimes the content turns out to be equal to the title's gravitas: "An American Tragedy," "An American Dilemma," "American Pastoral." Sometimes, though, the portentous merely announces the preposterous.

"American Rhapsody" is a generically gonzo retelling of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, laced with malicious Hollywood gossip, sexual and pharmaceutical braggadocio in the guise of rueful confession ("It was a life many of us had learned to live all too well: candles, incense, black satin sheets, zebra drapes, grass, coke, and sex"), and interior monologues in the imagined voices of, among others, Kenneth Starr, Hillary Clinton, "Bob Dole's Johnhenry," and President Clinton's ditto. Sounds like fun, but, as often happens, the pitch is more entertaining than the production, which in this case is four hundred and thirty-two pages long. Too bad *Reader's Digest* doesn't condense dirty books.

But surely—*bzzz!*—you knew all this already. What you may not know is that the author considers himself an honest man, a mature man, and a "public man." His honesty, to which he himself attests, consists in his willingness to describe his own porcine behavior toward women and in his eagerness to attack others as liars. Oliver Stone, for example, "outdid himself with 'JFK' and 'Nixon.' Both movies were utter and absolute lies. Worse, both movies, as far as future generations were concerned, pretended to tell the truth."



Joe Eszterhas

Fair enough. But what about future generations who read "American Rhapsody"? (An unlikely prospect, but still.) Eszterhas's method was to dredge the silt of whatever has worked its way into print that purports to touch on, so to speak, Bill Clinton's "willard" (especially the small print of the Starr Report and the ghosted books of Clinton's ex-girlfriends), embellish and dramatize the naughtiest bits (using the author's own experiences with groupies and starlets as a "generational" guide), and shape the results into a portrait of Clinton as a man who has spent his adult life "getting it on," taking drugs, and masturbating, apparently to the exclusion of all other activities. At least, that seems to have been Eszterhas's method. It goes without saying that "American Rhapsody" contains no footnotes or bibliography.

"In a self-defining psychosexual sense, for men in their relationship with women, the sixties were really a destructive time," Eszterhas said last week in one of his buzz-generating interviews, with *Salon.* "It took me a long time to mature." The proof of his maturity is that he divorced his first wife and married someone more satisfactory. Divorce (especially if followed by a presentable remarriage) is the

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

sacrament that wipes away all sin. Clinton's problem is that he has not dropped his pinch of incense on this particular altar. "I think one of the things with Bill Clinton is that he never has matured," Eszterhas went on to say. "And maybe it's my great fortune that I met a woman who was somehow able to cause my own maturation—and maybe Bill Clinton hasn't."

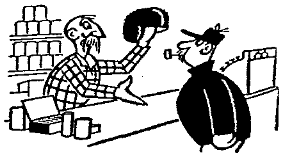
In "American Rhapsody," Eszterhas tells the story of his "great fortune" as an addendum to an account of a hot night of drugs and sex he claims to have spent with Sharon Stone. The story is that he obtained his present wife, Naomi, by introducing her then husband, whom he describes as a "friend," to Stone. "It worked," he writes. "Sharon and my friend fell in love. They broke up less than a year later. I married my friend's wife and lived happily ever after. On the day I married Naomi, I fought an urge to send Sharon a dozen dead roses, but I didn't want to do that to someone I'd created." A pretty tale. Mature is as mature writes, as Forrest Gump might say.

The "someone I'd created" claim is a reference to Eszterhas's script for "Basic Instinct," although Stone had already earned her stardom in "Total Recall." The claim is repeated several times. So is the author's description of himself as a "public man." Three years ago, he writes, in the very first line of "American Rhapsody," he "shut my phone down, stopped doing interviews, and pretended I wasn't a public man." Now, he writes, "I want to pretend permanently that I am not a public man."

It shouldn't be that difficult. There is a difference between a public man and a minor celebrity. Hubert Humphrey, for example, was the former. (Humphrey called his autobiography "The Education of a Public Man," though "American Rhapsody" might have been a better title.) But that distinction, like the general one between private and public life, counts for little these days, as the President has been taught. As for Eszterhas's book, it's really a combination of a treatment and a numbingly long op-ed piece. It's not as shocking as it's been made out to be. Its buzz is worse than its bite.

—Hendrik Hertzberg

RAG TRADE
PRICED OUT OF THE LOWER EAST SIDE

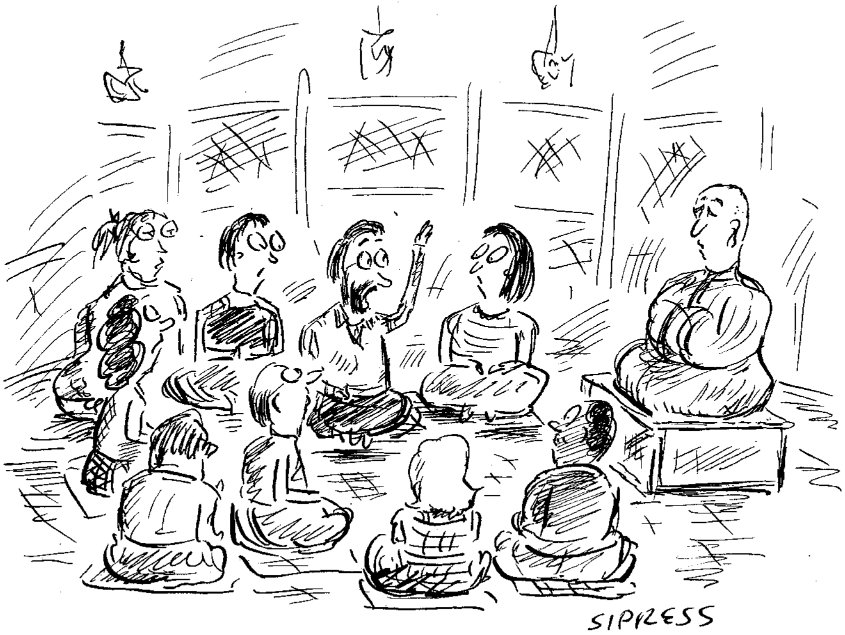


Seventeen years ago, the hatmaker Amy Downs opened a shop at the corner of Ludlow and Stanton Streets, and, from then on, that corner was where you went if you wanted a headpiece made from plastic or washcloths or those cheap raffia beach mats imported from China. Downs was there before Max Fish, before the Ludlow Street Bar, and long before all the trendy restaurants on Orchard Street, but chic creep has caused rents in the neighborhood to rise wildly, and finally, a few weeks ago, she was forced to shutter the store. Downs decided to throw a party on the sidewalk to say goodbye, and so, one recent evening, the block was jammed with tables and chairs and barbecue grills, and with men in shorts brandishing hot dogs and beers, and with women wearing wacky hats, and with women whose haircuts were so funny that they looked as though they were wearing wacky hats even when they weren't.

"Everybody always says I was the first person down here," Downs said, removing her own raffia hat. "But I say, 'No, I was the first white girl from Minnesota down here. There were always people down here.' " Among the people who were always down there were a lot of drug peddlers, whose clients would line up along the block to make their heroin purchases. "Thirty people came along here every day," Downs said. "But the dealers were very respectful. They would say, 'Don't you see the ladies are trying to run a business?' "

Downs was actually somewhat less efficient in the business department than her drug-pushing neighbors: she doesn't take credit cards, and her cash register is a teapot. "It was like playing post office," she said. The décor of the store changed almost as regularly as the stock of hats did, and it was always done on the cheap. At one point, the place was papered entirely in newsprint; another time, Downs hung plaster casts of animal heads on the wall and balanced hats on them. Most recently, the store's interior was Chinese red, and flowers made from plastic bags were pinned all over the storefront.

Downs's former partner, Mary Adams, who owns a dress shop next door, and is also moving out, stood by the sizzling hot dogs and said dreamily, "There was no crime in the old days." Well, not unless you count the dope peddling, or the shenanigans of the shop's landlord, Mark Glass, who was jailed in 1997 for, among other things, hiring a hit man with the intention of murdering one of his tenants. Downs and Adams didn't even have a lease with Glass—he was the kind of guy who did things on a handshake, at least before he started trying to kill people—so after he was sent away, for seven-to-fourteen,



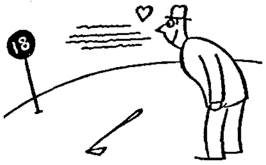
"Exactly what is this 'nothing' I've been hearing so much about?"

they found themselves facing eviction.

Adams's shop, where she sold party dresses and wedding gowns, is moving down the block; Downs is reopening in the northerly reaches of East Fourteenth Street—"the Champs-Élysées," she calls it. "I think there are women up there, which is good, because women buy hats," she said, sounding as unsure of her destination's demographics as a first-time tourist arriving at Penn Station. She does, however, have a firm plan for her next decorating spree. "I saw that Frank Gehry lunchroom in *Vogue*," she said, referring to the multimillion-dollar cafeteria the architect designed for Condé Nast. "I'm going to do that for five dollars."

—*Rebecca Mead*

THE SPORTING WORLD
AN ODE TO GOLF



I fell in love with golf when I was twenty-five. It would have been a healthier relationship had it been an adolescent romance or, better yet, a childhood crush. Though I'd like to think we've had a lot of laughs together, and even some lyrical moments, I have never felt quite adequate to her demands, and she has secrets she keeps from me. More secrets than I can keep track of; when I've found out one, another one comes out, and then three more, and by this time I've forgotten what the first one was. They are sexy little secrets that flitter around my body—a twitch of the left hip, a pronation of the right wrist, a cock of the head one way, a turn of the shoulders the other—and they torment me like fire ants in my togs; I can't get them out of my mind, or quite wrap my mind around them. Sometimes I wish she and I had never met. She leads me on, but deep down I suspect—this is my secret—that I'm just not her type.

Who is her type? Well, go figure. Fat guys like Craig Stadler and Tim Herron, and skinny wispy guys like Corey Pavin, and lanky skinny guys like Tiger Woods, and grim intense guys like Jack Nicklaus and Ben Hogan, and laid-back jokers like Fuzzy Zoeller and Walter Hagen and Lee Trevino. Golf isn't exactly choosy, you'd have to say, but she can turn a cold shoulder to anybody on a given date. If there's one kind of suitor she consistently rejects, it's the jittery, overanxious types, worrywarts who for all their lessons and driving-range prowess whiff on the first tee and stub a crucial three-foot putt on the eighteenth green. Golf likes a bit of sang-froid, the "What, me worry?" slouch, and spurns those who care too much and try too hard. I've tried not caring, but maybe I've tried too hard. She's an intuitive old girl; she sniffs you out. Those extra ten yards you think you can squeeze out of your swing—she's onto you while the club is still approaching horizontal. She likes guys (gals, too—she's through with gender hangups) who keep things simple and don't mind repeating themselves. And that, it breaks my heart to have concluded, lets me out.

So, why do I still love her? Why do I continue to pour hours and treasure into a futile and unreciprocated courtship? Well, she's awfully pretty. All those green curves, and dewy swales, and snug little sand traps; and the way she grassily stretches here and there and then some. She makes you think big, and lifts your head up to face the sky. When you connect, it's the whistle of a quail, it's the soar of a hawk, it's the sighting of a planet hitherto unseen; it's mathematical perfection wrested from a half-buried lie; it's absolute. And golf never lets you go a round without your connecting once or twice. You think she's turned her back, but, with a little smile over her nicely mowed shoulder, she lets a long putt rattle in, or a chip settle up close, or a seven-iron take a lucky kick off a greenside mound. Another foot to the right, and . . . oh, she is quite the tease.

And quite the accountant, too. How can you not love a game where a three-hundred-yard drive and a two-inch putt count the same? I mean, that's a sport with a sense of proportion. And the shapely, rhythmic way a round dwindles down, hole after hole, far and then closer, and closer yet and in, a journey ending in a burial and—whoa!—up out of the grave again, eighteen times in all, twice a cat's number of lives. In other games, somebody else is always getting in your way, all elbows and trash talk, brushing you back from the plate, serving to your backhand, giving you aggravation. Golf lets you do the aggravation all by yourself; there is nothing between you and the hole but what you've managed to put there. She's no flatterer, but she doesn't grudge credit where it's due, either: a scuffed drive, a skulled approach, and a putt that would have rolled ten feet past still make a par 3 on the scorecard.

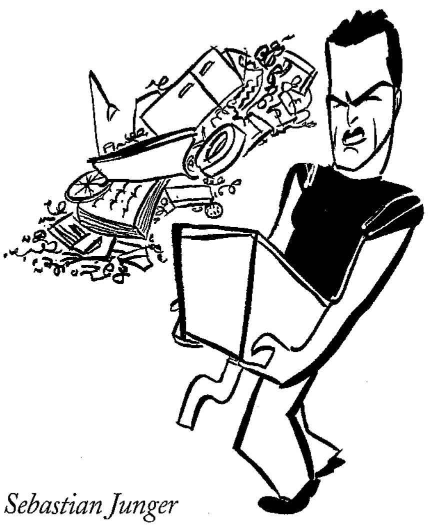
The tools—is it too intimate to talk about the tools, the tender way the leather grips invite the fingers to curl around them and adhere, the grainy grooved faces of the irons, the slither of a club being withdrawn from the bag, the flexing elegance of the tapered graphite shafts, even the merry dimples on the ball and the tiny sensation of give when the wooden tee penetrates the turf? Golf has the equipment to please a man, and she's not ashamed to use it. She's been around since the Scots monarchs were stymieing the English and old Tom Morris would spend a drizzly afternoon stuffing a single feathery with duck down; but you're as young as you feel, and my sweetheart still runs me ragged. And ragged, she keeps letting me know, isn't good enough. We'd break up in a flash, except we never really got together.

—*John Updike*

THE DRINKING LIFE
A HE-MAN OF LETTERS OPENS A TAVERN

There are few better ways to spend a summer morning than to sit next to a man in a van as he drives around the Bowery shopping for sinks—if the man happens to be Sebastian Junger, preparing for the opening of his Chelsea bar, Half King. "Thus far, the dump has been my favorite part of being a bar owner," Junger said as he maneuvered through rush-hour traffic, holding a lit Camel Light. "Yesterday, I had to go to the dump in Queens, and I had to be back at four-fifteen to do a live TV interview, but we got held up. So I was desperately trying to get back in time for the MSNBC limo, and I was just covered in dirt. I got into the chair and miked up literally two minutes before I went on, it was so fucking close."

Seeing Junger standing on the saw-



Sebastian Junger

dusty floor of his bar on the eve of its launch, you'd never guess that he's the author of "The Perfect Storm," the book behind the Hollywood blockbuster. In Half King's garden, as a squadron of workmen fed boards through whining table saws, Junger conferred with one of his partners, Jerome O'Connor, an Irishman and former contractor. "So do you have enough for a dump run right now?" Junger shouted above the clatter. "Nah? So I'll go get the sinks."

When they dreamed up Half King, Junger and his hardboiled pals were thinking of something quite different from the Café de Flore. They wanted to build a bar where the working man and the writing man could come to drink after a hard day of slinging rivets or sentences, and not be able to tell each other apart. They wanted a bar that would prove that writers are not sissies. "This bar isn't literary," Junger said. "The literary world gets obnoxious very quickly. This will just be a New York bar." Just a New York bar whose opening night was reserved for a guest list of literary agents, journalists, and television personalities. As far as bar games go, Junger and O'Connor have ruled out darts and pool. "I want bar archery," Junger suggested. "Or paintball in the garden," O'Connor joked. On Tuesday, though, the bar was not paintball-ready; in fact, the bar was not *painted*, the doors were not installed, and the special sconces for the lights had not arrived from upstate. Worse, unless Junger could scare up some sinks and bottle bins before nightfall, there would be nothing for his far-flung friends to drink at the launch party.

We headed downtown to Matas Restaurant Supply, near Rivington Street. "May I help you?" a subdued Asian man asked. His name was Leon. "Yeah, I need two ice bins and two bottle bins," Junger said. "For what kind of icemaker?" Leon asked. "Uh," Junger said. "I don't know." He stepped off to one side, called O'Connor on a cell phone, and returned. "We don't know," Junger said bravely. Leon looked at him skeptically, but then another man walked up. "You already got an icemaker, right?" "Yeah," Junger said. "Then it doesn't matter what kind of bin." They settled on the correct ice bins. "We can get them to you next week," the man said. This was a hard blow. "But we need them for tomorrow," Junger moaned. The man shrugged. "Try across the street."

Crossing the Bowery, Junger said, "I don't know what I'm doing, and if we run into someone else who doesn't know what he's doing we're fucked." At Daroma Restaurant Equipment Corp., a man named Alan handily set Junger up with the right bins. Then came a fresh crisis: Daroma would only take cash and Junger still needed a sink. After a quick negotiation (he promised to go to the bank), Junger wiped his forehead with the back of a bronzed hand. The bar equipment was headed for Chelsea; disaster had been averted. The guests would be arriving at Half King in a little more than twenty-four hours, and now, thank God, the beers would be cold.

—*Liesl Schillinger*

DEPT. OF HOOPLA
A TEEN CONVERGENCE IN SOUTHAMPTON

"Echo boom" is marketing lingo for the teen-age demographic, but it also describes the sound that was bouncing off the walls of several houses in Southampton on a rainy Saturday night recently. Anne Zehren, the publisher of the magazine *Teen People*, was hosting a party that featured an appearance by Sisqó, the young black pop star who spray-paints his hair platinum and sings the recent hit "Thong Song." A red carpet had been laid for entrance-making, and barricades had been erected in front of the privet hedges.

As guests milled around under a tent in the back yard—friends of the magazine, advertisers and their teen-age children, new pop singers and their entourages—Sisqó sat in a pink dining room with a knotted white stocking stretched over his hair. He was answering questions for a live Webcast. "How do you like the Hamptons?" someone asked. "I don't know, because I haven't been outside," he answered. Zehren, who is thirty-seven and as irony-free as her magazine, was holding forth in Pucci. "This generation of teens is very inspiring," she said. "They're open-minded, and they're friends with their parents. It's a misconception that they're troubled."

If anybody at the party was troubled, it was the women in their early twenties. "I see these sixteen-year-olds dancing on tables at clubs out here, and I feel totally over the hill," Stephanie Ercklentz, an analyst at Merrill Lynch, said. "On my last birthday, I was crying to my parents, 'Don't you see that I'm twenty-two and I'm no longer young?' " Courtney De Long, an acting student, was holding two glasses of wine in her hands. "I just turned twenty, and I feel so old," she said. "I'm actually beginning to understand things from my mother's perspective."

Pretty soon it was time for the performance by Sisqó. Although he already has a five-year-old daughter and has spent time in jail, he looked boyish as he jumped around with a crew of barely clothed dancers. "Let me see that thong . . . thong! thong! thong!" he sang, and dozens of teen-age girls screamed and wiggled on the dance floor. Despite the noise, Muriel McMahon, Zehren's eighty-nine-year-old neighbor, whose ancestors founded Southampton in the seventeenth century, was having a marvellous time. "They're all so beautiful," she said. "It's wonderful to be young, isn't it?"

A group of local teen-agers standing out on the sidewalk in the rain would probably have disagreed, even after a *Teen People* staff member came out and gave them some Sisqó paper fans to console them for being excluded from the party. "I don't see why everybody wants to come to Southampton in the summer," one girl said as she walked away. "This is the most boring place in the world."

—*Bob Morris*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

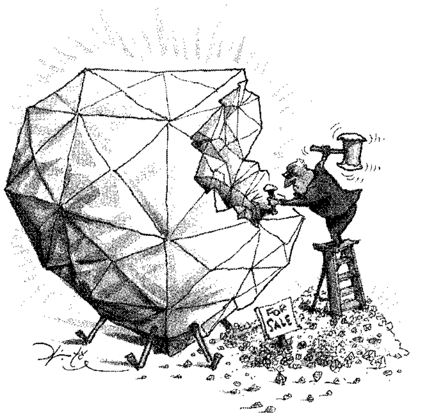
THE DIAMOND MARKET VS. THE FREE MARKET

In the mid-fifties, the South African company De Beers found its domination of the world's diamond markets under threat. At the time, De Beers controlled the sale of more than eighty per cent of the world's "rough"—uncut—diamonds. But gems from Sierra Leone were being transported in caravans to Liberia and then finding their way onto the global market, undermining De Beers's ability to set prices for the entire industry. So the company did what came naturally. It hired Sir Percy Sillitoe, the retired head of MI-5, to create a paramilitary outfit called the International Diamond Security Organization. Sillitoe, in turn, recruited a crack team of mercenaries in Sierra Leone, who ambushed the caravans on their journey to Liberia. Within three years, there were no more caravans.

Cloak-and-dagger tactics of this sort don't get taught at Harvard Business School, but for most of De Beers's history they were routine. Although the company is responsible for more than forty per cent of the world's annual diamond production, its real power has come not from its mines but from its control of the Central Selling Organization, or C.S.O., part of what's known as the Syndicate. Year after year, the Syndicate essentially dictated how many diamonds would be sold, and at what price. And so De Beers's recent announcement that it would no longer attempt to regulate the world's diamond supply wasn't just an adjustment in corporate strategy. It was the end of an era.

For sixty years, De Beers made sure that diamonds retained their scarcity value. To do so, the company had to manipulate the market, keep producers in line, prevent the smuggling, buying, and stockpiling of diamonds, and quash all attempts at competition. When a huge diamond field was discovered in Siberia, in the fifties, De Beers cut a secret deal with the U.S.S.R. to buy all the diamonds it could produce, at above-market prices. When Zaire tried to sell its diamonds outside the C.S.O., De Beers made sure there were no buyers. Thanks in part to an intelligence organization that Markus Wolf would have been proud of, De Beers was able to hold together the most effective cartel of the twentieth century.

Every fifth Monday, diamond dealers made their way to 17 Charterhouse, the elegant London building where the C.S.O. dispensed its wares. There they were presented with a box of gems with a set price attached, and their only choice was "Yes" or "No." No bargaining was allowed, and although complaints about the quality of the gems were tolerated (if they were voiced in a civil tone), a dealer who turned down a box was unlikely to be invited back. Harry Winston rejected a box in the fifties, and returned to the fold only after De Beers blocked his attempt to cut a deal with the Portuguese colony of Angola.



MICHAEL WITTE

But since the mid-eighties, when De Beers controlled ninety per cent of the diamond market, the company has been watching its empire shrink. The end of the Cold War made it harder to impose discipline on Russian diamond producers. Rich new mines began producing in Australia and Canada. Political turmoil in Central and West Africa led to widespread smuggling and a flood of so-called "conflict diamonds." And De Beers's practice of soaking up the world's excess diamond supply by serving as the "buyer of last resort" has proved tremendously expensive. De Beers has had to spend billions to stockpile diamonds in a vault, accumulating dust instead of interest. In the past four years, the company's profits have stayed flat.

Hence De Beers's new plan. Although the Syndicate will remain in operation, De Beers is going to start selling off a huge chunk of its diamond hoard, worth four billion dollars, and focus its efforts on selling the stones from its own mines. But don't expect bargain-basement sales anytime soon. Despite the setbacks, the company retains two-thirds of the world's diamond trade, which means that it still has tremendous leverage. De Beers and its partners, exploiting a coincidence of humanitarian and commercial interests, have been mobilizing governments to ban the sale of "conflict diamonds." (Where it once enlisted mercenaries, it now enlists human-rights organizations.) Besides, after sixty years of prospering in a cartel, the major players in the diamond industry are in no hurry to break out and start a price war. Diamond dealers from around the world will still travel to London for their boxes—even though it's conceivable that, one day soon, a buyer might actually offer less than the Syndicate is asking and not be tossed out on his ear.

The really remarkable thing is how long the Syndicate has lasted. Cartels are, after all, notoriously unstable. Over the past hundred years, the producers of all sorts of goods—including newsprint, tin, coffee, copper, steel, and rail—have tried various cartel-like arrangements to fix prices. But these cartels quickly succumbed—sometimes to the menacing knout of antitrust law but often to the temptation to slash prices and move inventory. (It's in an industry's collective interest to keep prices high but in each firm's individual interest to sell all it can.) More recently, OPEC has been only erratically successful at keeping its members in line, which helps account for the wild swings in oil prices over the past three decades.

So give the folks at De Beers their due. While cartels were collapsing all around them, they kept theirs intact, albeit with business practices that owed more to Ian Fleming than to Andy Grove. The Syndicate outlasted colonialism and it outlasted Communism, and throughout that time it has—with few exceptions—kept diamond prices stable and rising. For the better part of a century, in short, De Beers beat back the market. Of course, things change. Diamonds are forever; cartels are not.

—*James Surowiecki*

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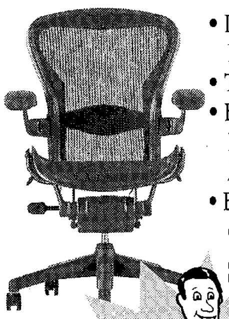

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THE WORLD OF BUSINESS

MOUSETRAP

What Time Warner didn't consider when it unplugged Disney.

BY JAMES B. STEWART

Late on Sunday, April 30th, Robert Iger was watching television in his apartment, on Fifth Avenue. Iger, who looks younger and fitter than the average forty-nine-year-old executive, was wide awake, and not because of "Terminal Rush," the movie then showing on Channel 7, a wholly owned affiliate of the ABC network, which, in turn, is owned by the Walt Disney Company. Iger had recently become president of Disney—the second-highest position in the organization—and he knew that he might be facing the biggest crisis of his short tenure. That afternoon, negotiations over a new contract between Disney and Time Warner, the owner of the cable systems that carry the ABC signal into millions of homes, had broken down.

It was a sweeps period, when network ratings are measured by Nielsen Media Research. ABC had heavily promoted the latest variation of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?," the top-rated show on television, which would air on Monday night, with celebrity contestants. The same night, a new miniseries, "Arabian Nights," would have its conclusion, and at the end of the sweeps period Michael J. Fox would be making his last appearance on "Spin City." Time Warner, however, had said that it would cut off ABC's cable transmissions if the two sides hadn't agreed on a new contract by April 30th.

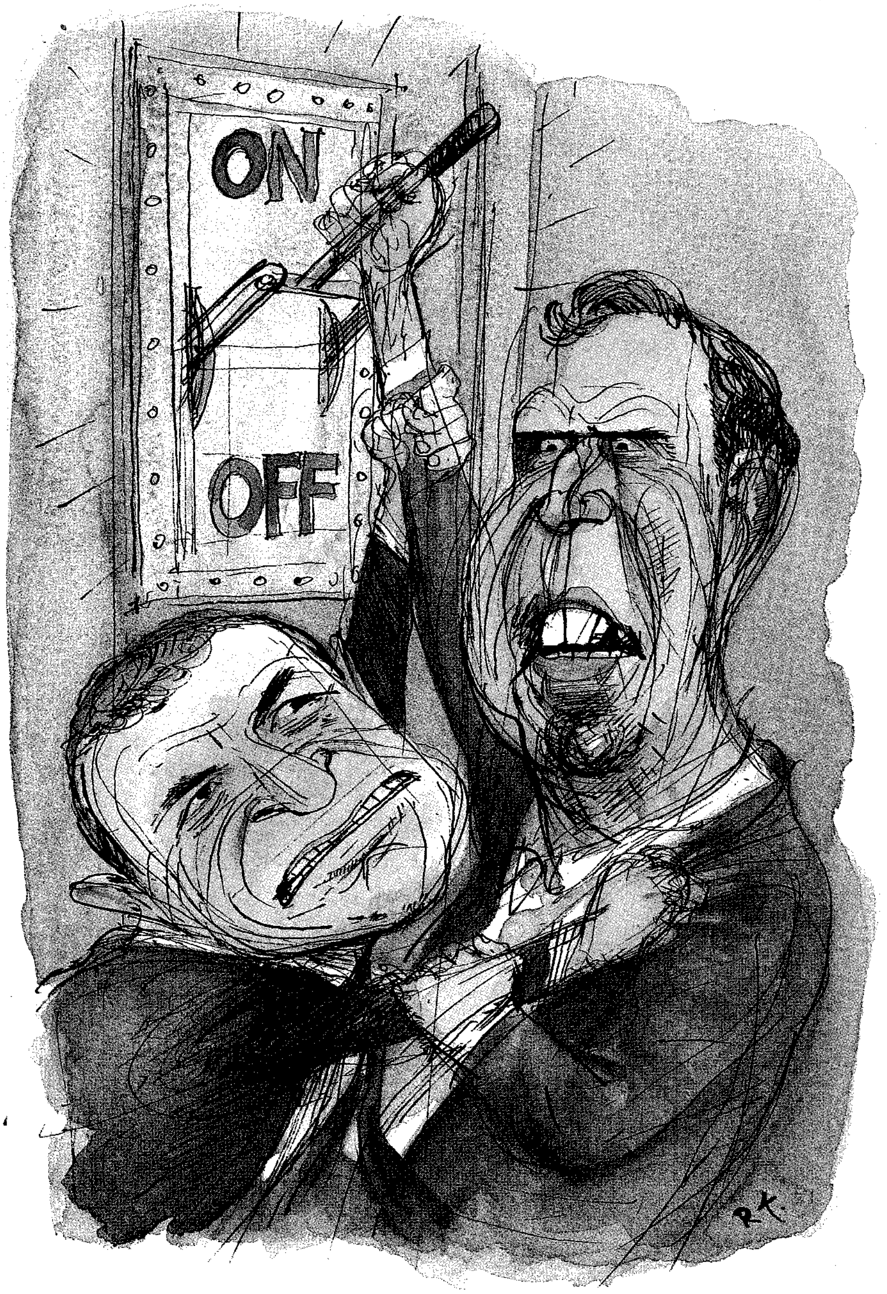
Iger was less concerned about ABC's ratings than about the recent decision by Time Warner to merge with America On Line, the Internet giant. Iger, and others at Disney, believed that Time Warner's and A.O.L.'s ultimate goal was to control access to the Internet, much the way Time Warner controlled cable access in the cities where it owned cable franchises. Disney saw this as a threat to its existence as an independent company.

Some Disney executives believed that Time Warner wouldn't risk enraging the public by cutting off popular programming. Others, including Iger, thought that Time Warner would try to use the financial pressures of a sweeps period to force Disney to give in. Feelings ran so high that the two camps bet on the outcome. In an attempt to defuse the situation, at least temporarily, Iger asked ABC's lawyers to send a letter giving Time Warner permission to continue broadcasting ABC programs after the April 30th deadline.

Iger's wife, Willow Bay, happens to be a CNN anchorwoman and a Time Warner employee, and Iger had told her nothing about the dispute. By midnight that Sunday, she was asleep, and Iger watched alone as the picture on his television became fuzzy and turned to snow. As the audio track incongruously continued, he reached Michael Eisner, the Disney chairman, who was returning home from a movie screening in Los Angeles. When Iger told Eisner what had happened, Eisner said, simply, "Wow." The screen turned a flat blue, as someone at Time Warner cable evidently struggled to get a storyboard on camera. Finally, a written message appeared, which began, "Disney has taken ABC away from you."

Iger was furious that Time Warner was blaming Disney. He had worked at ABC, in television, for twenty-seven years. His Manhattan apartment alone had eleven cable boxes, for which he paid Time Warner more than three hundred dollars a month. When the picture vanished, he said, he was reminded of an early scene in the 1983 ABC movie "The Day After," in which Kansas City is hit by a nuclear missile.

Three months later, it is clear that Time Warner's decision to cut off ABC will enter the annals of historic business blunders. Among other things, it has jeopardized the A.O.L./Time Warner merger, which once seemed assured. Many saw the decision as a brazen exercise of monopoly power, and Time



"We feel you'll be hard-pressed to cause trouble," Robert Iger (left) told Gerald Levin.

Warner's competitors have become especially concerned about the implications for the Internet. (High-speed Internet access to A.O.L. will be carried over Time Warner's cable network, which serves 12.6 million people, in some of the most important markets in the country.) If Time Warner could shut off a TV network, could it do the same to portions of the Internet?

On May 17th, Orrin Hatch, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, wrote to the Federal Trade Commission, expressing concern about "the enormous ability and will of Time Warner to restrict consumer choice to gain market leverage." The F.T.C. is conducting a non-public investigation into the merger. The Federal Communications Commission has scheduled hearings for Thursday, July 27th. And the European Commission, which recently helped derail the proposed merger between WorldCom and Sprint, has said that the A.O.L./Time Warner plan needs further scrutiny, which will likely delay any merger at least until November. Even if the merger is approved, it seems probable that the company will have to operate within regulatory constraints that it had hoped to avoid.

Indeed, the most far-reaching and unexpected consequence of the affair may be that owners of the Internet infrastructure, including cable wires, will have to carry all programming, no matter where it comes from, on equal terms. Time Warner's treatment of Disney has attracted more support for this approach, which is called "open access." With open access, cable companies would be more like telephone companies, which are barred by law from discriminating among users of the phone lines. Advocates of open access are focussing on cable wires, because they are likely to deliver so-called "broadband" services into people's homes. Broadband technologies, which make it possible to transmit enormous amounts of digital information quickly, are required for high-speed Internet access and next-generation interactive television.

Lawrence Lessig, who taught cyberspace law at Harvard and is now at Stanford, and who advised Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson in the Microsoft case, maintains that, given Time Warner's action against Disney, "the government ought to say that the principles of open access will be the model for the Internet in the future, and if you don't honor that principle you will be regulated."

The crisis had its origins in the Cable Act of 1992, which provided for broadcasters to negotiate so-called "retransmission consent agreements," defining the terms under which their programs are carried on cable systems. These agreements involve rates as well as a willingness on the part of the cable systems to accommodate new channels. Time Warner carries twelve Disney-owned channels, including the sports channel ESPN and its progeny, and the Disney Channel.

Disney, which has owned the ABC network since 1996, entered negotiations last summer with a number of new requests, foremost among them a request for Time Warner to carry SoapNet, the new soap-opera channel, which runs twenty-four hours a day. Time Warner resisted. Disney also wanted the Disney Channel, a premium channel, moved to Time Warner's basic-cable menu; that would permit it to charge Time Warner for the programming—far more lucrative than subscribers' fees, which are split with the cable company. This, too, Time Warner resisted.

By December of 1999, with the existing Disney-Time Warner retransmis-

RICHARD THOMPSON

sion agreement set to expire at the end of the month, the matter had reached the top levels of the two companies. Gerald Levin, the Time Warner chairman, invited Michael Eisner to lunch at Time Warner headquarters, in Rockefeller Center, on December 10th. The two men seem to have little in common. Eisner is famously combative; the more diminutive Levin styles himself a philosopher and visionary. Meetings between the two have been rare, especially since 1993, when Time Warner, as part of a national advertising campaign for its Six Flags theme parks, portrayed a dog behind a chain-link fence and labelled the picture "Disneyland." Eisner denounced the campaign as "reasonably despicable" and, after Time Warner refused to stop running the ads, cancelled Disney theme-park advertising in Time Inc. publications.

Eisner didn't like what he had heard about the terms of the ABC deal, but when he arrived at Time Warner he found that Levin had bigger, more worrisome matters on his mind—matters that, in retrospect, Eisner finds astonishing. Levin told Eisner he was "nervous" that a big Internet company was trying to take over either Time Warner or Disney, or both. Levin, in Eisner's recollection, argued that stock valuations of "old media" companies like Time Warner and Disney were depressed, whereas the stock of dot-com companies was so high that they could buy almost anything. Both Time Warner and Disney, he suggested, were in "jeopardy."

"We'd never do a deal using that currency," Eisner said, referring to the inflated stock of the dot-com companies. Then Levin suggested that the solution might be for Time Warner and Disney to merge.

Eisner was startled, and dismissed the notion out of hand. He didn't understand why Levin seemed to feel such pressure. (When I asked about this, Levin acknowledged, through a spokesman, that he had raised a concern about dot-com valuations, but said it was Eisner who made the merger proposal, which he took as a joke.)

After the merger exchange, there wasn't much left to say. It was only as Eisner was leaving that he brought up the ABC negotiations. "Gerry, I don't want to fight with you over this," Eisner said. "I hate this deal, but I'm not going to stop it. Just get it done." Eisner knew that key elements, such as the soap-opera channel, were unresolved, but he didn't want to intervene personally in the negotiations.

The two chairmen spent less than a minute discussing the cable negotiations. They shook hands, and Levin took the handshake as a sign that they had an agreement to settle the impasse.

"How can you feel threatened by someone young enough to be your sullen, uncommunicative daughter?"

Then, on January 10th, Disney executives heard about A.O.L.'s proposed merger with Time Warner. So this was what Levin must have been worrying about, Eisner realized. Iger was stunned.

"Doesn't this change the entire landscape?" Eisner asked him. "We should stop the negotiations, stop talking. Let's catch our breath. We have to think this through."

The Disney executives were already concerned about cable operators' growing power over the Internet. After A.T. & T. announced that it would buy T.C.I., and then MediaOne, which would give it control of the nation's largest cable system, Disney considered joining Open Net, a coalition that promotes open access to the Internet. But it backed away, because the cable industry objected, and cable included some of Disney's largest customers. Time Warner was a bigger threat than A. T. & T. With its stable of cartoon characters, like Bugs Bunny and Road Runner, and its Warner Bros. studio operations, it was one of Disney's strongest competitors.

A.O.L. itself had long championed the concept of open access—government-imposed, if necessary—but that was because A.O.L. was distributed over telephone wires. Eisner correctly predicted that when A.O.L. got broadband distribution over Time Warner's cable wires its position would swiftly change. After the merger was announced, Steve Case, the chairman of A.O.L., said that open access was something that A.O.L. had hoped "would come through the marketplace, as opposed to the government having to get involved."

Disney, Iger told me recently, believed that a combined A.O.L./Time Warner would "put our ability to advance our businesses in jeopardy." As the Internet and television converge, television will become increasingly interactive, he said, and A.O.L./Time Warner "could prevent these technological advances from being applied to our programs. It's very complex technologically. There's a lot of power there."

Iger convened a strategy meeting at ABC headquarters, on West Sixty-sixth Street. At the meeting, top executives argued that the very source of Disney's anxiety—the power of a combined A.O.L./Time Warner—could be turned to Disney's advantage. That idea was picked up by Preston Padden, a former president of ABC and now the head of Disney's Washington office. Padden, who is fifty-one, has brought a singular intensity to lobbying, and has won a reputation as a champion of open access.

Padden emphasized that the merger of Time Warner and A.O.L. would get at least some regulatory scrutiny—and that that might be the ideal moment for Disney to address its fear that A.O.L./Time Warner's programming would be favored over Disney's. Surely, Padden said, Time Warner would be eager to avoid anything that even hinted at monopoly power, which, after the Microsoft trial, had to be a subject of keen interest. Padden wanted to take these issues to regulators immediately.

Eisner suggested that Disney go to Time Warner and demand assurances that Disney's programming would be treated the same as Time Warner's. If not, he said, Disney would lobby against the merger in Washington. With Eisner's approval, Iger broke the news to Time Warner in a telephone call to Gerald Levin and Joseph Collins, the chairman of Time Warner Cable, who had been handling the negotiations. "We're concerned about the deal," Iger said. "It's off the table."

Levin and Collins were surprised and angry. "We had a deal," Levin said, referring to his handshake with Eisner.

"The world has changed," Iger said. "The players have changed. It's A.O.L. and you. It's a complicated world."

If anything can be said to have made war between Disney and Time Warner inevitable, it was this decision by Disney to link the ABC negotiations to the A.O.L. merger. All at once, a relatively discrete business dispute had escalated into something else. Disney's pressure tactic—an implicit threat to undermine the proposed merger—struck directly at Time Warner's most important corporate strategy.

Now it was Time Warner's turn to feel that its future was threatened. Levin argued that Disney was "abusing" the cable negotiations by tying them to the merger. But Iger wanted new terms, and, in what he considered an effort to be "deadly candid," he added, "We feel you'll be hard-pressed to cause trouble because of the merger process you have to go through." The conversation came to an abrupt close.

Iger followed up by instructing Anne Sweeney, the president of the Disney Channel, to send a new "term sheet," which, he concedes, was "aggressive." In addition to all the previous requests, it removed some assurances that Time Warner had sought with respect to ESPN, asked for about a hundred million dollars more in fees, and contained numerous "non-discrimination clauses"—guarantees that Disney programming would get equal treatment. Disney's focus on the merger was also made explicit in a provocative letter of February 18, 2000, from Sweeney to Time Warner's Collins, in which Sweeney said that she was "even less optimistic that we will be able to bridge the material differences between us." Sweeney referred specifically to such issues as channel placement, or "screen bias," and mentioned the need to address "non-broadcast distribution platforms including, without limitation, narrowband internet, broadband internet and cable." The letter, which began, "Dear Joe," also contained an explicit regulatory threat, noting that "Congress and antitrust regulators have grown increasingly concerned" about these questions.

Time Warner executives estimated the additional cost of the proposed new deal at three hundred million dollars. "Cable is like the Old West," Richard Parsons, the president of Time Warner, said to me. "The mentality is 'Be tough.' . . . Our guys saw this as blackmail, nothing more nor less."

Time Warner officials were further galled by the emphasis on equal treatment in programming; in their view, Disney conspicuously favored its own programming. (Time Warner calculated that Disney provided more than two-thirds of ABC's prime-time programming and eighty per cent of the rest.) Time Warner responded with a term sheet of its own. It rejected nearly all of Disney's requests and lowered the price it was willing to pay. Now Disney thought that it might have to pull its programming off the Time Warner cable systems to force a resolution.

This had happened elsewhere, most notably in January of this year, when News Corp. took the Fox channels off the Cox Communications cable systems. But Disney recognized that pulling its programs not only risked angering consumers; it also involved a calculation that Time Warner needed Disney more than Disney needed Time Warner. Disney's position had strengthened over the bargaining period—ABC, boosted by the success of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" and the Super Bowl, in January, had become the No. 1 network—but the lesson of the Fox-Cox dispute was that the interruption in service had hurt both the cable system and the network.

One morning in the first week of March, Eisner, still preoccupied with the merger, got out of the shower with a plan for escalating the campaign against Time Warner. He went straight to his computer and drafted an E-mail outlining the strategy he thought Disney ought to follow. After consultation with top executives, he decided to launch an attack in Houston, where the Disney Channel had been switched from basic service to premium when Time Warner took over the cable system from T.C.I. Houston, Disney believed, would be a valuable testing ground for strategies that could be tried nationally, and it was big enough to sting, without provoking a full-blown counterattack.

Preston Padden was dispatched to Texas to run the campaign, which began immediately. Full-page advertisements in the Houston *Chronicle* warned that cable subscribers were at risk of losing ABC, because of Time Warner's recalcitrance. Disney offered to subsidize the installation of satellite dishes if subscribers switched to a rival service. Padden took Disney's case to the mayor, the city council, and the newspaper editorial boards.

Time Warner countered by arguing that the dispute with Disney was just about money, and that Disney would be to blame if there were to be any interruption in service. Local press coverage was initially unfavorable to Disney, but Disney did see its view represented in an editorial in the *Chronicle*, and ten of fifteen city-council members endorsed the notion of open access. Perhaps more to the point, Disney gave away vouchers for eighteen thousand satellite dishes in less than three weeks. Parsons, the Time Warner president, and Gerald Levin were briefed about Houston by Collins. They were not unduly concerned, although, as Parsons put it, "this was getting ugly."

To test the effect of the Houston campaign, Disney declared a unilateral truce on April 1st. It suspended the satellite-giveaway program and the public-relations blitz. And it proposed new terms for the retransmission agreement, softening the position it had staked out in February. But Time Warner's bargaining position, in Disney's view, got tougher. With Levin and Collins angered by what they considered Disney's betrayals and bad faith, Time Warner unveiled the ultimate threat: if Disney didn't agree to an eight-month extension of the existing retransmission agreement (which did not give Disney the soap-opera channel and kept the Disney Channel off basic cable), Time Warner would cease transmitting ABC when the current extension expired, on April 30th. In other words, Time Warner threatened to use what Iger, citing another nuclear-war metaphor, thought of as a "tactical nuclear weapon"—taking ABC off the air.

Iger and his colleagues didn't know how seriously to take this threat. Still, Disney scrambled to head off the crisis by offering another month's extension of the existing agreement. It also pointed out that F.C.C. rules barred cable operators from suspending programming during a sweeps period.

At this point, the lawyers stepped in: Alan Braverman, the general counsel of ABC, and Marc Apfelbaum, the general counsel of Time Warner Cable. In a series of letters, Apfelbaum set forth what would prove to be a rigid legal standard: that without an agreement signed by both parties federal law actually required Time Warner to suspend ABC programming.

Braverman and others at Disney were surprised by what appeared to be a tortured reading of the applicable statute. Time Warner had already granted an extension of the existing agreement on five occasions without adopting that interpretation. Apfelbaum seemed to have arrived at a position that a competent lawyer would reach only if he had been ordered by a non-lawyer to do so. (Time Warner declined my request to ask Apfelbaum about this, but didn't disagree with my characterization of the situation.) In any event, Collins and his colleagues in the cable division were confident that Disney would capitulate; Levin and Parsons shared their optimism.

As the April 30th deadline approached, Disney kept trying to extend the agreement by letter and fax. ABC network and station executives, worried about the effect on ratings, had been pleading with Iger to make a deal. Eisner was so absorbed by the affair that he couldn't sleep; he was on the phone to Iger at 6 A.M. Sunday—3 A.M. in California.

Late Sunday afternoon, Iger organized a conference call of the roughly thirty executives involved in the crisis. He took a roll call, gave an impassioned speech ("We will stay the course," he said), and assigned battle stations for an anticipated non-nuclear exchange. Each station manager was told to record a message to viewers to be aired at 11 P.M. Disney, meanwhile, made one last effort—an offer that Iger insisted be simple and clear. Braverman faxed Apfelbaum a one-paragraph document giving Time Warner "unconditional and unequivocal consent" to transmit ABC's programming through May 24th. At 4:32 P.M., Apfelbaum reiterated Time Warner's position that it had to drop ABC and rejected any more extensions. Then, at 8:47 P.M., Apfelbaum faxed Braverman again, blaming ABC for the crisis, and expressing "regret" that ABC "has declined our offer to enter into a new agreement that would avoid further disruption to the public."

Despite this language, no one at Time Warner had told anyone at Disney exactly what was being planned: that Levin, at approximately 3 P.M., had given Collins the final approval to pull the network, and had notified Steve Case, the chairman of A.O.L., in an E-mail. After the eleven-o'clock news, Tom Kane, the general manager of WABC, in New York, appeared live on TV to prepare viewers for the possible loss of the network.

Meanwhile, Padden, the architect of the Houston attack, had flown to New York and checked in at the Four Seasons Hotel. Padden had scheduled meetings the next day with the *Times* editorial board, a deputy mayor, and the city's corporation counsel. As midnight approached, Padden tuned in Channel 7. As he waited, he felt how thoroughly at the mercy of Time Warner Disney was. Midnight came, and the movie continued without interruption. Padden called Iger. "I guess they backed off," Padden said. The Four Seasons, it turned out, doesn't use Time Warner Cable.

On Monday morning, Iger woke at his usual time, 4:30 A.M., and worked out at the Reebok Sports Club across Columbus Avenue from ABC headquarters. He reached the office at six, and shortly afterward left for Los

AN OLD STORY

It's hard being in love
with fireflies. I have to do
all the pots and pans.
When asked to parties
they always wear the same
color dress. I work days,
they punch in at dusk.
With the radio and a beer
I sit up doing bills,
jealous of men who've fallen
for the homebody stars.
When things are bad
they shake their asses
all over town, when good
my lips glow.

—*Bob Hicok*

Angeles, just as ABC's phone lines were becoming jammed with callers, many of them from other media. In an approach modelled on James Carville's all-out defense of President Clinton during the impeachment inquiry, Iger and Padden began a non-stop schedule of media appearances. Padden had spent the early hours of the morning drafting talking points to guide Disney executives, linking Time Warner's action against ABC to Disney's concerns about the merger with A.O.L. Eisner stayed off the air; he didn't want the crisis to be too closely identified with him, or with the Disney brand.

In Washington, ABC's lawyers filed an emergency petition with the F.C.C., arguing that Time Warner had violated the commission's rule prohibiting the dropping of a local station during a sweeps period. They made much of Time Warner's misleading claim that Disney had "taken away" the ABC signal, and charged that Time Warner's action reflected "precisely the arrogant abuse of monopoly power which the Commission sought to curb in implementing the 1992 Cable Act."

The petition seemed to have the intended effect. Late on Monday, Iger spoke to the F.C.C. chairman, William Kennard, who promised to act quickly, and left Iger with the impression that the F.C.C. might order Time Warner to restore the channels. Meanwhile, in New York, Houston, and Los Angeles, Disney offered free satellite dishes to the first thousand callers willing to drop Time Warner and switch to DirecTV. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, in particular, seemed angry that he had been misled by Time Warner about the circumstances of the shutdown. Iger appeared relaxed. "We were the victims, and they lied—that was basically it," he says.

Time Warner executives were still hoping, late on Monday, that Disney, facing a ratings disaster, would capitulate. But at this point Disney didn't consider the option. Padden joined Iger in California, and met with media people and government representatives in the Los Angeles area; they rented a helicopter to get around. And by Tuesday morning Disney seemed to be winning in every way.

Even without Time Warner's three and a half million affected cable viewers, the night was a ratings coup for ABC. "Millionaire" alone pulled a rating of 22.1 (each point represents about a million homes), and in the New York area, where the signal was missing from more than a million households, the show exceeded the national average.

On Tuesday morning, Iger spoke to Senator Charles Schumer, of New York. Schumer told Iger that his household was among those that had been blacked out by Time Warner the previous night: "My daughters are complaining that they couldn't watch 'Celebrity Millionaire.'" He wouldn't take sides, he said, but added, "TV signals should not be pulled off the air because of corporate battles." He said that he had already spoken to Levin and had asked him to extend the agreement with Disney for six months and get ABC back on the air.

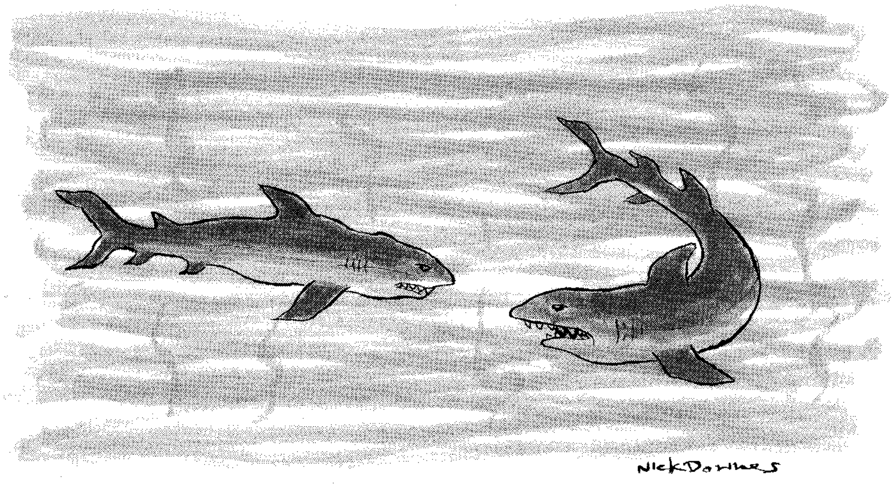
In times of crisis, Levin had often called upon Time Warner's president, Richard Parsons, who is fifty-two, and who seems to have an instinctive sense of diplomacy. Parsons had been in Washington on Monday, trying to tend to merger issues; when he got home that night, his wife, who had been watching the news coverage, said, "How could you be so stupid?"

On Tuesday morning, Levin invited Parsons to his office, in Rockefeller Center, and asked him what he thought. "Putting aside tactics and the law, this is a disaster for our company," Parsons said. "It's a nightmare. We have to get our cable guys out in front of this." Levin agreed, and the two concluded that Time Warner had to act quickly. They'd get ABC on the air that afternoon and ask Disney for a six-month extension of the existing agreement; they scheduled a press conference for later that morning. But the impasse with Disney still had to be resolved. Levin delegated Parsons to negotiate a settlement directly with Iger, bypassing Collins. Parsons hadn't developed any personal antipathy to the Disney negotiators, as the "cable guys" had. In fact, he liked Iger. "Work something out," Levin told Parsons. "We've got to get this behind us."

At 3:21 P.M., ABC reappeared on the Time Warner systems, even though none of the underlying issues had yet been settled. Then Iger called Parsons, saying, "This wasn't good for either of us, but it was worse for you." The two agreed to come up with at least the framework of a deal, but the negotiations quickly came to a halt over Disney's demands for equal treatment on the Internet and in any interactive programming. Parsons finally told Iger, "Look, I'll agree to treat Disney content like Time Warner's when you agree to treat Time Warner's content on ABC the same way you treat Disney content. For starters, we'd like seven prime-time shows on the network."

Parsons thought that that would highlight the absurdity of Disney's demand. Iger pointed out that Time Warner could sell its programs to any of at least six television networks, whereas Time Warner had a cable monopoly in much of New York City.

Realizing that the issue was not going to be decided right then, Parsons said, "So why don't we negotiate the rest



"You've got a bit of thong caught between your front teeth."

of the deal and see what we've got." Iger agreed reluctantly.

At that point, negotiations proceeded rapidly. Disney's hand was further strengthened on May 3rd, when the F.C.C. ruled that Time Warner Cable had "committed a clear violation of F.C.C. rules," as Kennard, the F.C.C. chairman, put it. A *Times* editorial spoke of Time Warner's "blunt use of monopoly power." At a cable convention in New Orleans, according to *Fortune*, Brian Roberts, the president of Comcast Corporation, complained, "There's no winner" in such disputes. "It's lose, lose more." And C. Michael Armstrong, the chairman of A.T.&T., speaking for the industry, added, "Shame on us."

Eventually, Disney got almost everything it wanted: the soap-opera channel, basic-cable placement for the Disney Channel, and two new channels yet to be developed. Time Warner got the rate protection on ESPN that it wanted, a six-year retransmission agreement for ABC, and an extension of the other channels at the price that had been part of the earlier accord. Disney called off its satellite-giveaway campaign. The total value of the deal to Disney is hard to calculate, but by Disney's reckoning it is nearly three billion dollars—more than thirty per cent better than the prior agreement.

With ABC back on the air, the dispute between Disney and Time Warner has shifted to Washington. In February, when the Senate Judiciary Committee held hearings on the A.O.L./Time Warner merger, Time Warner officials had congratulated themselves on the ease with which they answered questions. But Orrin Hatch's pointed letter in May to the F.T.C., which can go to court to block the deal or modify its terms, hinted at further hearings, noting that "several Committee members are concerned" that the merger "could give the combined company an ability to leverage its market power, to the detriment of consumers, into all areas of e-commerce." Late last week, an emboldened Disney called for the merged company to be split in two, what Padden termed "content and conduit."

The issue of open access has been seized upon by public-policy advocates such as the Consumers Union, which has criticized Time Warner, and by prominent academics, notably Lawrence Lessig. Lessig is no particular friend to Disney, having opposed the company in its efforts to gain copyright extensions on its most popular cartoon characters, including Mickey Mouse. But he has become a strong proponent of open access.

"What frustrates me is that the same power the cable companies have over television will be extended to the Internet," Lessig told me recently. "History is not encouraging. Once the influence of Hollywood media penetrates the cyberspace world of A.O.L., the Hollywood view will take control. Hollywood's view has never been for open access. It always wants to maximize control."

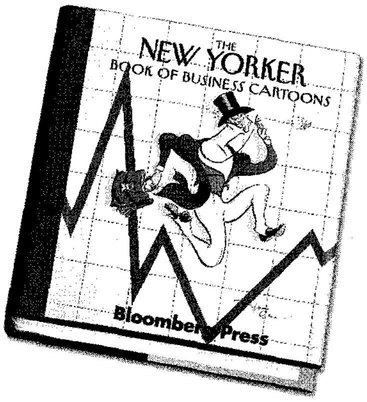
Lessig maintains that the solution is not to wait until A.O.L./Time Warner, or anyone else, has monopolized the Internet but to prevent any monopoly from forming by making open access to the Internet a cornerstone of federal policy: "Someone in the government has to talk about the principle of how we design cyberspace. Then the government has to be clear that the Internet is where the policy will be enforced."

Time Warner and A.O.L. officials insist that the merger will be approved, and continue to argue that the market, not the government, should decide the fate of open access. Yet, as one A.O.L. executive told me, they concede that they've "got a level of scrutiny that otherwise would not have happened."

There are no illusions about this at Time Warner. "Gerry conceded it was a blunder in our first meeting, and we've said it was a blunder," Parsons told me when we met at Time Warner headquarters, in late June. "Not to make excuses, but there was a lot going on at the time, and Gerry and I were not as focussed on this as we might have been."

Parsons promises that Time Warner will never again unilaterally stop carrying a broadcast signal, even though it thought at the time that it was legally obligated to do so. "We've apologized to our customers," he said. "Our customers pay us thirty-two dollars a month to get a cable service that includes ABC, and they don't care about our problems with Disney. They don't care about the legal issues. And one thing we learned is that there's no P.R. in the world that will overcome the 'Millionaire' show." ♦

Very funny business, indeed!



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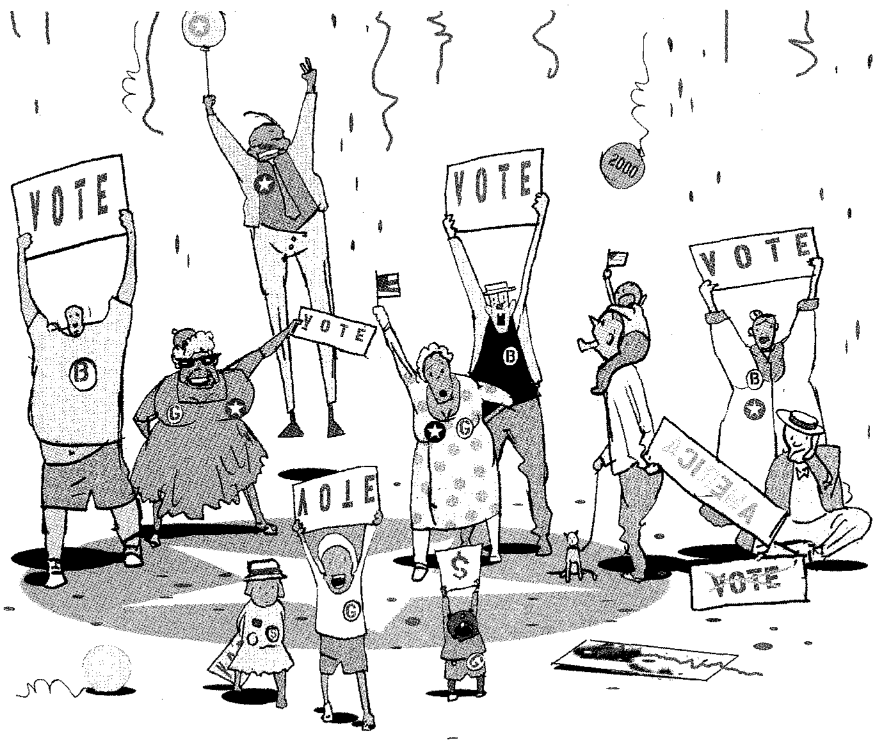
OFFICIAL CONVENTION HANDBOOK

BY BRUCE McCALL

See your Row Captain (yellow boater) to find out if you are at the Democratic or the Republican Convention.

- Delegates can stay informed on when and where to mill by watching their Milling Captain (red boater). Remember: C-SPAN's television cameras will be locked down. You will be milling out of their range if you step outside the rhomboid painted on the floor of your Delegation's allotted Milling Zone.



ISTVAN BANYAI

- Delegates not experiencing repeated déjà-vu-like symptoms during speeches from the rostrum may be suffering from attention-deficit disorder. See a licensed psychologist or obtain a free set of earplugs on any People for a Wealthier America hospitality floor.

- If you need to be present at an upcoming Delegation roll call, give your seat and row number to the Row Captain, who will make every effort to wake you up at the appointed time. We apologize to those whose sleep may be disturbed by sudden loud, sharp sounds. This is the gavel.

- If you are a Vice-Presidential candidate at this Convention, please wear your cone-shaped hat at all times. Note: If you can name all fifty states, you may be eligible for nomination as a Vice-Presidential candidate. Write your full qualifications on the reverse side of your business card and leave it at the rostrum.

- Representatives of an outdoor-confrontational-sports-equipment booster group may come around to solicit your vote on behalf of their candidate slate. In such a case, remember to stay in your seat, keep your hands away from your body, and make no sudden moves or gestures.

- If you are compensated for changing your vote by a lobbyist for People for a Wealthier America or any other group, remember that checks cannot be assigned to a third party without disrupting the democratic process.

- Political reporters have priority in the Video Game Arcade during all speeches. Please coöperate!

- People for a Wealthier America's Roving Happy Hour Teams will be circulating on the Convention floor from 9 A.M. to midnight daily. Tipping is not required.

- Delegates who can remember the names of four out of any five speakers in any single session may be eligible for early dismissal. See your Aisle Captain (green boater).

- Vice-Presidential nominees: If there is no chair reserved for you on the rostrum, stand six paces behind the Presidential nominee and wave until he gives the signal to stop.

- There is an error in Rules & Procedures, p. 437: two or more caucuses do not equal a Russian mountain range.

- "Smoke-filled room" is only a political-convention figure of speech. This Convention has been declared a smoke-free environment. If any room you enter during this Convention does smell of smoke, you are probably in the Fair Shake for Big Tobacco hospitality lounge. If it is not the Fair Shake for Big Tobacco hospitality lounge, inform your Section Captain (blue boater) immediately.

- The last person to speak at the Convention will be your Presidential nominee. He will be introduced by your Vice-Presidential nominee; remember to jot down his name to avoid embarrassing questions after you have returned to your home state.

- Notice: A complimentary boxed three-hundred-cassette video record of this Convention will be sent to all attending delegates. If you do not wish to receive this video record, send your check for five hundred dollars to the Treasurer of your party. ♦

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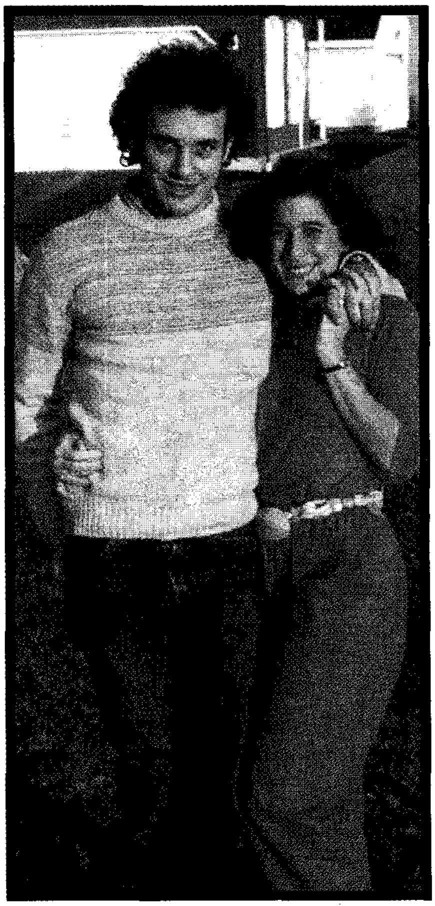
LETTER FROM LAS VEGAS

THE HARRIET-THE-SPY CLUB

A doctor's wife disappeared. The women he dated compared notes.

BY TAD FRIEND



Bob Bierenbaum and Gail Katz in 1982.

ALAYNE KATZ COLLECTION

Five years ago, two friends, Suzanne Kogan and Jenny Linden, went to a minor-league hockey game in Las Vegas. Suzanne started to flirt with the guy in the seat next to hers, a handsome, dark-haired man. Suzanne is a nursing-home executive. She has a way of biting off her words as if she wished you'd get to the point. The man eventually did: he told her that he was a mortician.

Next!

"Everyone I meet is a mortician, or like a mortician," Suzanne whispered to Jenny. "Do *you* know anybody good?"

Jenny, who is an anesthesiologist, is as chatty as Suzanne is terse. "I went out with a guy who's great!" Jenny said. "He's a plastic surgeon, flies his own plane, does charity surgery down in Mexico, scuba dives, is a gourmet cook—"

"Wow!"

"And he's a great skier, plays classical guitar, doesn't have any children, and he's Jewish. He's perfect on paper."

"So?"

"I can't put my finger on it. The conversation didn't flow—it was like being on an international phone call."

"Well, I want to meet him—give him my name," Suzanne said. It turned out that Suzanne had already run across the man Jenny was describing, Dr. Robert Bierenbaum, at the bar mitzvahs and brisses that draw together the city's Jewish-doctor circle. She had noticed that he smiled a lot, seemed to know everyone, and was candid about wanting to get married and have children before he was forty. He was then thirty-nine. "The rumor was that he came on real strong, went through a lot of women. People would say, 'Who's Bob marrying now?' " Suzanne told me. In the course of four years, he gave the same diamond to three different women.

When Bob called to ask Suzanne out, he started talking about Jenny: "You know the girl doesn't like you when she sets you up with her friend." But the conversation picked up, and eventually Bob murmured a seductive phrase in a foreign language.

"Oh, you're bilingual?" she said.

"Actually, I speak eleven languages," he said. Suzanne noted that Bob wasn't particularly shy about his accomplishments. But when they went to an Indian restaurant on their first date, in January of 1995, she found herself having a lovely time. "He was great, fun, too good to be true," Suzanne said. "And I'm thinking, What's wrong with this guy? O.K., he's a little hyper, but a lot of Jewish guys are."

After dinner, they went back to Bob's house in the Lakes, an expensive subdivision west of Las Vegas. Inside, Suzanne observed a peculiar mixture of fastidiousness and disarray. The ground floor was stylishly decorated, and there was a gleaming assortment of professional-quality pots and pans in the kitchen. But upstairs was a mess of unopened boxes. It looked as if Bob, who had moved in two years earlier, had never really unpacked. Later, she noticed that his back yard was still just dirt.

Before long, the couple found their way to Bob's bedroom. Afterward, however, Suzanne became cautious. "I had been married twice, I had a nine-year-old kid, I had plenty of baggage, and I wanted to hear about his baggage," she told me. She asked Bob if he'd ever been married. He said that he had, but then refused to talk about how it had ended.

Finally, after an awkward pause, Suzanne joked, "What'd you do? Kill her?"

"Bob turned about five different shades of color," Suzanne told me. "He said 'What do you know?' and he's looking at me like, Who the hell have you been talking to?" After a tense few minutes, Bob calmed down. "Finally, he told me his story," Suzanne said. "Years earlier, he was married to a woman named Gail, they were living in Manhattan, he was putting in long hours as a resident, she was a student with a serious drug problem—depressed, having affairs. All this led to a big argument between them on a day that they were to go to his nephew's birthday party. She walked out of the apartment in shorts and a halter top and never came back.

"Years later, her torso washed up on Staten Island, and they identified it because of a distinctive curvature of the spine. He told me he felt strongly that Gail had committed suicide or had fallen in with bad people, but that her parents had accused him of murder." When Bob stopped talking, Suzanne was silent. She felt awful. Then he asked her not to tell anyone about his past. "It was clear he was doing a startover with his life," she said. "He was trying to leave that behind. I started thinking, Oh, poor you, and I said I'd keep the secret." But, of course, she didn't.

Bierbenbaum with his second wife, Janet. Ex-girlfriends considered warning her against him. Photograph by Jeff Mermelstein.

The first law of gossip is that you never know how many people are talking about you behind your back. The second law is thank God. The third—and most important—law is that as gossip spreads from friends to acquaintances to people you've never met, it grows more garbled, vivid, and definitive. Out of stray factoids and hesitant impressions emerges a hard mass of what everyone knows to be true. Imagination supplies the missing pieces, and repetition turns these pieces into facts; gossip achieves its shape and amplitude only in the continual retelling. The best stories about us are told by perfect strangers.

When Robert Bierenbaum moved to Las Vegas, ten years ago, he surrounded himself with strangers. "We jokingly call it Second Chance City," says Ernest Sussman, a urologist, who is a close friend of Bierenbaum's. "A lot of doctors who come here had trouble elsewhere—behavioral problems, practices that didn't work, whatever." (The type is epitomized by Jules Segal in Mario Puzo's "The Godfather": a surgeon from the East who takes refuge in Las Vegas after an abortion scandal.) Bierenbaum had come West from Manhattan at the urging of a childhood friend from New Jersey, Scott Baranoff, who had a urology practice in town. On an all-doctor ski trip to Switzerland, Baranoff and an older plastic surgeon named Charles Vinnik raved to Bierenbaum about the medical opportunities in Las Vegas.

"Las Vegas has a *lot* of plastic surgery," says Dr. Julio Garcia, who stitched up Evander Holyfield's ear after Mike Tyson bit it off. "This is a service-oriented town where tipping is important, so if you're an older blackjack dealer, or a cocktail waitress with sags, it can make financial sense to get surgery."

Bierenbaum made a good impression on many of his new colleagues, who found him to be a skillful surgeon and an easygoing friend. "He was a model citizen, one who just could not volunteer enough of his time," Sussman says. Bierenbaum regularly flew himself to Mexico to perform free surgery on children who had cleft palates. He loved to fly: he often double-dated with his doctor friends, flying a group to Lake Tahoe for a skiing weekend. But he told almost none of his friends about his marriage. "He knew that his wife's disappearance wouldn't add to his panache," a friend of Bierenbaum's told me. "It's not a great pickup line: 'Hi, my wife disappeared, and people think I murdered her!' "

For a time, Suzanne Kogan kept Bob's secret reasonably well; while they were dating, she shared it only with her mother. But, after an intense six months together, Bob abruptly broke up with her in July, 1995. So, soon afterward, when Suzanne had dinner with Jenny Linden, she no longer felt obliged to be discreet. The two friends met at the Mayflower, a quiet Asian-fusion restaurant in one of the city's numerous mini-malls, where it is situated both geographically and aesthetically midway between an oxygen bar called Breathe and a Jack in the Box.

Suzanne told Jenny how Bob had been very devoted at the beginning—"Mr. Wonderful, a fairy tale"—but then came to seem increasingly odd. "He could never sit still to read the Sunday paper or watch TV," Suzanne said. (At their request, I have changed Suzanne's and Jenny's names, as well as the names of their relatives and certain identifying details.)

A few minutes later, Jenny said, "I've always been surprised that Bob didn't run for office." A committed Republican, Bierenbaum was active in the Rotary Club and in Leadership Las Vegas, a boosters' group. The one framed photograph in his office, which sat on top of the filing cabinet, was a shot of him with Newt Gingrich.

"Skeletons in his closet," Suzanne replied. "Did you know he'd been married?"

"No!"

As Suzanne recounted the grisly saga of Gail and the torso, and how Gail's parents suspected Bob, Jenny kept saying, "Oh my God, oh my God."

That night, when she got home from dinner, Jenny told the torso story to her fiancé, Rich Taylor, who also knew Bob. He immediately suspected Bierenbaum. "You dated him!" Rich said. "You dated a killer!"

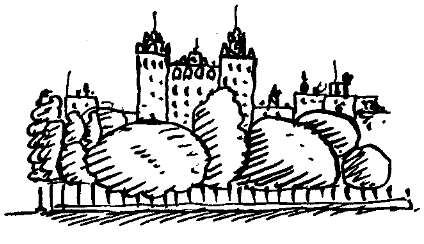
"If this is 'Six Degrees of Separation,' " Jenny says now, "then Suzanne is one, I'm two, and Rich is three, and the further out you go the more convinced the person becomes that Bob did it. Suzanne thought, Oh, another nutty Vegas doctor with a past. I thought, This is really bizarre! And Rich was convinced the guy was an axe murderer."

"There was something with Bob that I've never felt before or since," Rich told me recently. "He wouldn't look me in the eye, and then he looked right through me with the intensity and darkness of an obsessional killer."

This kind of hindsight is a hallmark of gossip. A startling bit of new information about a person, even if it is implausible, prompts a reinterpretation of every puzzling previous interaction. And if the person in question is not someone we know well, the reappraisal is all the more swift and absolute.

For a long time, Suzanne's story was the only clue Rich and Jenny had that something bad had happened to Gail. Additional evidence proved elusive. They went to the library and looked up "Bierenbaum" in the New York *Times* archive, but they didn't find anything. Jenny tried Internet search engines such as Yahoo! and Cyber 411, typing in "Bierenbaum" and "torso" and "missing" and "murder." Nothing came up. Nor did the F.B.I.'s Web site mention a Gail Bierenbaum murder.

Then, one night, Jenny and Rich rented "Boxing Helena," a movie about a surgeon who chops off his beloved's arms and legs in order to keep her prisoner. As they watched, they shouted almost in unison, "That's what Bob did!" Their quest had become a kind of Hitchcockian game—Grace Kelly sneaking into the suspect's apartment in "Rear Window," or Teresa Wright in "Shadow of a Doubt" racing to the library to research whether her charming uncle, Joseph Cotten, could be a killer. Whenever Jenny was getting ready to go to a medical conference that Bob might also be attending, Rich would taunt her about him. "I'd say, 'He's a killer, he's a killer!' " Rich says. He would go so far as to page Jenny at the conference, typing "86776" into her beeper—numbers that, on a telephone, spell "torso."



Rich and Jenny dined out on the spooky tale of Bob and the torso for years. Meanwhile, Bob remarried and moved with his wife to North Dakota. "We weren't finding anything out, and Bob was now out of reach," Rich told me. "I always just figured he would get caught because he'd do it again—that he'd kill his brand-new wife, too."

One day early in 1996, about six months after Suzanne and Bob had broken up, she dropped by his small office to pick up some belongings that she'd left at his house. She began chatting with the office manager, Laurie Francis, with whom she'd become friendly. As they commiserated about having to deal with Bob, Suzanne mentioned the story of Gail and the torso.

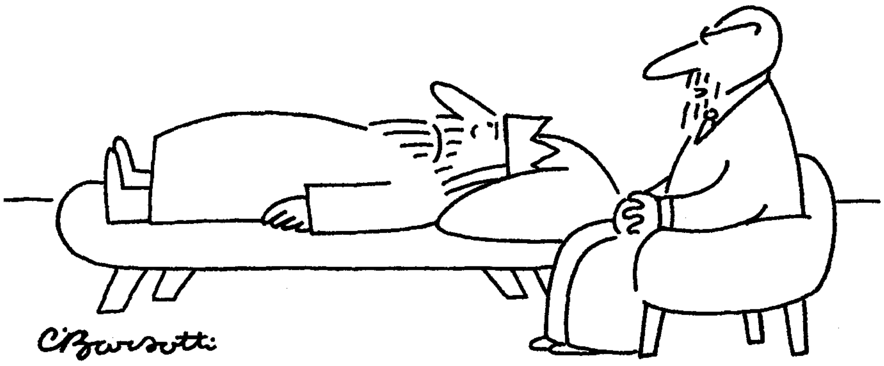
Laurie was shocked. She immediately passed the details on to the office receptionist, Carol Villanueva. Carol then phoned Sharon Nicholson, Bierenbaum's previous office manager, to tell her the story. All three women went into a swivet of speculation: this astonishing news, even in its most innocent interpretation, seemed to explain a lot about their boss. In contrast to the relaxed fellow his male colleagues knew, Bob Bierenbaum was something of a terror at work. His employees were leery of his high-handedness and fits of rage, traits that had led them to secretly refer to him as "B-dash-B," in reference to the Jewish tradition of spelling God as "G-d."

"Bob was very moody, and he yelled a lot," Laurie told me, adding that his eyes darted about uneasily and that his stomach was often upset. And Carol would later attach particular significance to an incident from 1991. A patient had called her to ask how many procedures of a certain kind—Carol believes it may have been breast reductions—Bob had performed. "He'd only done three, but I knew I was supposed to say 'numerous,' " Carol told me. "The patient wanted an exact number, and I said, 'I don't *know* exactly how many.' Bob was nearby, and I guess he didn't like what I was saying, because he nudged me on the shoulder, not very hard. I turned and saw him throw his hands up in horror at what he had done, and then scurry back to his office. Later, he came out and said, 'I'm so sorry I hit you. Really, I'm *so, so* sorry.' I said, 'You didn't hurt me—it's fine.' And I looked at Sharon like, What is this guy's problem?"

The story about Gail also seemed to shed light on Bierenbaum's peculiar workplace rules: any employee who touched the mail—except to pluck out *People* magazine—would be fired. Bob instituted this rule after Sharon Nicholson saw a credit-card circular addressed to Gail Katz-Bierenbaum. Employees were also told that they would be fired if they accepted any subpoenas. Bierenbaum refused to advertise his practice on billboards or to have a brochure made up. "I want nothing in print," he told Sharon. "He was the first plastic surgeon who came to Las Vegas and left," his colleague Dr. Garcia says. "We all wondered why he didn't succeed, because he certainly liked to hobnob, which is how you get referrals."

Bierenbaum seemed more interested in succeeding at a relationship than at a career. In addition to talking ceaselessly about his wish to be married, preferably to a Jewish woman, Bob often gave his staff sexually triumphant morning-after reports about his dates—"First date, first time!" he'd say. Shortly after he'd broken up with Suzanne, he met Janet Chollet. She was a gynecologist, a Catholic, and, as he gleefully told his employees, a virgin. Chollet accepted Bob's proposal of marriage, along with the same diamond he had offered to two other women. (To change his luck, Bob had had it reset in platinum.)

Bob and Janet were married in New York, in the spring of 1996, and that summer they moved to Minot, North Dakota. The town's Trinity Health Center, where Janet's brother worked, had guaranteed Bob a sizable income. The Bierenbaums apparently lived happily in North Dakota: Janet gave birth to a daughter, who is now twenty months old; Bob was written up in the Minot *Daily News* for his bagel and pizza recipes. No one inquired about his past.



"Today we're going to talk about lowering the drawbridge."

A week before the wedding, however, Bob had called Suzanne Kogan and said that his fiancée was having second thoughts. Janet had seen a copy of Gail Katz-Bierenbaum's death certificate, which had come to Bob in the mail from his lawyer. (In order to be married in New York, Bierenbaum had to show proof of his previous wife's death.) Bob had told Janet that his first wife died of unknown causes, so the death certificate gave the prospective bride a nasty shock: in the box marked "Death Was Caused By" is typed "Undetermined (torso)"; just below, the word "Homicide" is circled.

Suzanne says that Bob wanted advice when he called, and she gave him some. "If you'd get comfortable in your own skin, you wouldn't even need to marry Janet," she says she told him. "You hardly know her, she's not Jewish, and North Dakota? For a gourmet cook who speaks so many languages? Please." Bob ignored Suzanne's advice, and she hasn't spoken to him since.

In April, 1998, investigators from the Manhattan district attorney's office arrived in Las Vegas and began asking questions about Bierenbaum and his missing first wife, Gail. The investigators took particular interest in several of Bob's ex-girlfriends, including Suzanne Kogan and Miranda Collier, a dentist who had dated Bierenbaum for three years in the early nineties. News of the investigation spread quickly through the city's small medical community, and was even discussed in operating rooms over anesthetized patients: "Did you hear about Bob Bierenbaum?"

After the investigators went back to New York, Suzanne and Jenny arranged a dinner with Miranda, whom they both knew, to talk about Bob: they all felt that he was possibly, or even probably, capable of the murder, and they wanted to see if together they could turn up some evidence. "It was girl talk with a purpose," Jenny said. "We hoped to help the police, but ultimately we were detectives more in the sense of a Peter Sellers movie than 'Mission: Impossible.' "

They met at the Mayflower, and for two hours they traded stories about Bierenbaum. Jenny complained about the way he'd discussed her with all of her friends after just one date: "I told him, 'This is a small community, and I don't want you talking about my private life.' He looked crushed, and he said, 'Oh, I'm sorry. I'm *so, so* sorry.' The response was all out of proportion to the crime."

Suzanne talked about her final trip with Bob, when they'd flown to a conference in Virginia. "He was being very nasty and distant, and he wouldn't tell me what was wrong," she recalled. Finally, she said, Bob came toward her, silently holding his hands out in front of him: they were covered with red spots.

Alarmed, Suzanne had asked, "Are you dying?"

"It's syphilis," he said. (One symptom of secondary syphilis is copper-colored spots on the extremities.) "You had an affair, and you gave me syphilis!"

"I remember laughing, because it was so absurd," Suzanne said. "But I was really mad. Later, he learned that the rash was something else, and apologized."

Suzanne had treated Bob's moodiness as a foible, but Miranda said that she had grown fearful of his sudden possessive rages. (I have also changed Miranda's name and occupation.) He had never been physically violent, but she was concerned about how he would react when she broke up with him. She waited till she was leaving on a trip and then asked him to move out.

The three women decided to meet regularly to stay on top of the investigation. Their code word was "torso"—as in, "We need a torso meeting"—but Jenny coined the name that stuck. She dubbed the group the Harriet the Spy Club. (Bierenbaum later heard a rumor that the group was called the I Hate Bob Club.)

The second Harriets dinner at the Mayflower, that August, was abruptly cancelled. Suzanne's mother, Barb, who had asked to be included, was getting a preparatory facial that afternoon when she reached for her cell phone, rolled off the table, and shattered her right ankle. At the rescheduled dinner, in November, Barb set the tone. As soon as she sat down, she looked at Jenny and said, "I can't believe you fixed my daughter up with a murderer!"

"He could have killed me!" Suzanne said, her eyes widening.

"Hey, I went out with him three times, too!" Jenny protested.

Barb then held forth about Bob, a critique she recently repeated to me in her cottage behind the Desert Inn golf course. A large and cheerful woman with bright hennaed hair, Barb runs a small business out of her kitchen. The day I visited, the table was spread with newspaper and covered with two dozen half-painted figurines of scantily clad women with their legs apart. These Naughty Nellies, as they're called, are souvenir reproductions of a type of bootjack peculiar to Old West bordellos. Barb hopes to sell them in Las Vegas's better department stores.

After we settled in her living room, Barb told me that she'd been suspicious of Bob from the start—not as a murderer, necessarily, but as a lousy potential son-in-law, which, in her eyes, amounted to almost the same thing. Although Bob called himself a gourmet cook, Barb said that when he made paella in her kitchen he "turned it upside down" and all that came out was a "big pot of mess." Then, at Passover, Bob wanted to run the Seder—"He had a lot of balls!"—when, of course, it was Barb's husband, Sol, who would head the table. Bob wanted to piggyback on the family's connections to get high-society clients—"He knew we weren't selling pencils!"—but he made her friends uneasy, and they all went to Beverly Hills for their face-lifts, anyway. Bob had such a "dark energy," she said. "He gave us all a chill."

After Barb had delivered her indictment at the second Harriets dinner, Jenny announced the scant results of her latest Web searches: she'd found a single article Bierenbaum had written, for the Grand Forks *Herald*, about how to avoid snowblower injuries. She was planning to ask friends in New York to look for news clippings on Gail's disappearance, and she might canvas Bierenbaum's classmates from Albany Medical College. Then there was some discussion of how Bob's father, Marvin, who was a cardiologist and whom Suzanne hadn't much liked, had a laboratory in which she heard he did medical experiments on dogs. The Harriets speculated that Bob could have used the lab to cut Gail up. Miranda said that Marvin had told her that "Gail's disappearance was the best thing that ever happened to Bob."

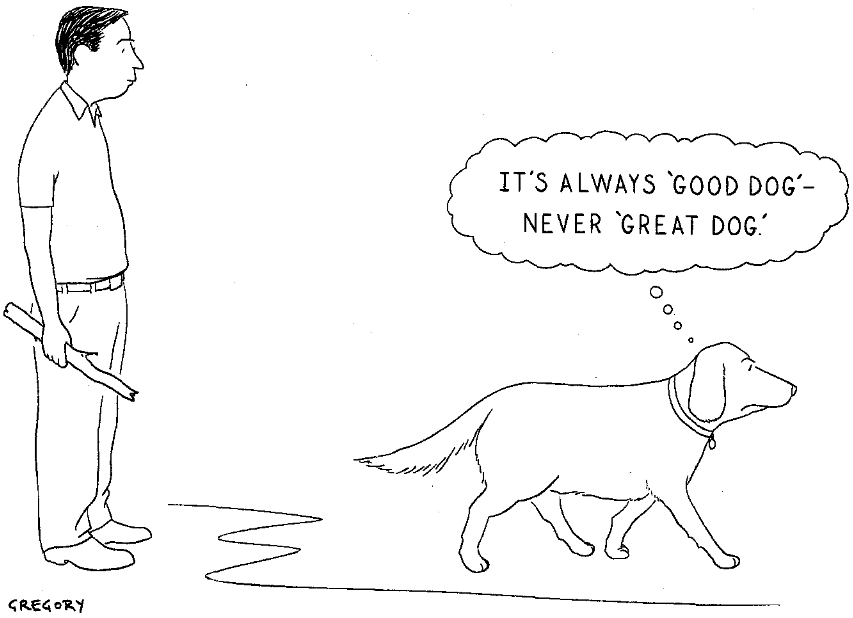
Miranda also said that she kept thinking about what could have happened to her or Suzanne if they'd made Bob really mad. As their musings grew increasingly sombre, the Harriets wondered if someone shouldn't tell Bob's new wife about their concerns. No one volunteered.

Alayne Katz, Gail Katz-Bierenbaum's younger sister, is a forty-two-year-old family-practice lawyer. When I visited her home, in Westchester County, recently, I was met by a slight woman with reddish hair and large brown eyes who carried a folder full of photos, news clippings, and police reports. Although we were discussing events that began two decades ago, Alayne spoke with near-perfect recall, and referred to the folder just once.

"Initially, I thought Bob Bierenbaum was sweet, intelligent, and good-looking," she told me. "But even before the problems began Gail told me, 'Bob looks perfect on paper—until you meet him, when you see that he's a social moron.' On a double date once, Bob kept putting food in my mouth with his chopsticks, which just seemed weird and embarrassing. And his shirttails were always hanging out, like a ten-year-old's."

Alayne talked about how Bob was a resident at Maimonides Medical Center, in Brooklyn, while Gail was pursuing her Ph.D. in clinical psychology at Long Island University. She showed me old snapshots of Bob and Gail in happier times, including a few of them at their wedding, which took place on Labor Day weekend, 1982.

A month before the ceremony, Gail called Alayne at their parents' house in Long Island. She was crying hysterically. "Bob hurt the cat," she said. "You have to help me." Alayne drove into Manhattan, and Gail told her that Bob had suddenly become wildly jealous of her cat and had


IT'S ALWAYS 'GOOD DOG'—
NEVER 'GREAT DOG.'
GREGORY

dunked it in the toilet bowl, apparently intending to drown it, until Gail pulled him away. "She insisted we take the cat to the shelter to save it from Bob," Alayne recalled. "I kept saying, 'Let's not get rid of the cat—let's get rid of Bob!'"

She closed her eyes, then continued: "Gail told me, 'No, I love him.' I think it was partly her feeling that she could change him, make him more secure in her love—and partly that the wedding invitations were out, so the relationship was going to have to work." But it didn't. Gail, Alayne told me, resented her husband's niggling criticisms of her weight, her hair style, and her clothing. She'd always worn trendy clothes; as Mrs. Bierenbaum, she began buying conservative wool skirts. But she also rebelled against a life of domestic propriety, and sought refuge in occasional cocaine use and in at least one affair.

"Bob was working a hundred and twenty hours a week, so Gail severely lacked for his attention," a confidant of Bierenbaum's told me. "But she was high-maintenance, a self-absorbed whiner. She loved the idea of being the doctor's wife more than she loved the doctor."

Fourteen months after the wedding, Bob came home one day and saw Gail studying for an exam and smoking a cigarette. Although he'd forbidden her to smoke, she sneaked cigarettes to lose weight. He vaulted over the couch and began choking her. On November 12, 1983, Gail filed a police report—which was never pursued—stating that "her husband did strangle her to the point at which she lost consciousness." (Bierenbaum's confidant acknowledges that "a physical incident" occurred, but says it was less serious than Gail claimed.)

Bob seemed remorseful, but Gail and members of his family strongly urged him to seek counselling. Dr. Michael Stone, a psychiatrist, consulted with Gail and Bob separately a total of five times. Alarmed by the hostile dynamic between them, he decided not to take them on as patients. "I tried to convince Gail she should leave him A.S.A.P., but she wouldn't listen," Stone told me.

Stone was sufficiently concerned that, on November 20th, he sent Gail a duty-to-warn letter. By signing and returning it, she would acknowledge that she had been counselled to live apart from her husband, and that, "owing to the unpredictable nature of my husband's physical assaults and to the chronic nature of the characterological abnormalities that underlie these assaults, no firm date can as yet be fixed as to when it might be safe to resume living together." The advisory added, "If I do not heed this advice, I must accept the consequences, including the possibility of personal injury, or death, at the hands of my husband."

Gail kept the letter, but she never signed it. She did move out and live with her grandfather for a short period, but she soon returned to Bob. The marriage did not improve, and Gail started having an affair. On Saturday, July 6, 1985, Gail spent part of the day planning a surprise thirtieth-birthday party for Bob—and part of it looking for an apartment for herself. She was twenty-nine.

Bob later told the police that the following morning he and Gail had had an argument, after which she walked out of their apartment on East Eighty-fifth Street. She left her pocketbook behind, telling him, he would later say, that she was just going to get some sun in Central Park. On the evening of July 8th, thirty hours after she had supposedly left, Bob reported Gail missing. The next day, Gail's mother accused Bob of killing her. (She would continue to leave messages—"I know you murdered Gail!"—on his answering machine for several years.) Alayne Katz and Gail's lover believed that Bob might have learned of his wife's plan to move out and been provoked into a homicidal rage.

The Katzes told the police enough about the couple's marital history that when Bierenbaum was next interviewed, on July 13th, Detective Thomas O'Malley was less gentle with him. Bob had already told the police that his wife had a "history of mental illness" and that she had attempted suicide in 1979. This time he added that "his marriage was in bad shape and he and his wife were always having fights." After recording Bierenbaum's observations, O'Malley continued in his report:

> I then asked him if he ever attempted to strangle his wife, and he said very abruptly he did not want to talk about it. When asked of any incident with a cat, I received the same abrupt-type answer: "No." . . . As we concluded Dr. Bierenbaum said, "This doesn't look right and people are going to start to wonder." When I asked him what he meant he said, "It's obvious, isn't it?"

Shortly thereafter, Bierenbaum hired a lawyer and declined to speak further with the police.

The police investigation seemed to be languishing, so in 1986 the Katzes asked the chief of the Manhattan district attorney's investigative division to look into the case. The D.A.'s office, too, focussed on Bierenbaum. An official there told me that they were troubled by Bierenbaum's response when the police called him a year later, in July, 1986, to say that they were holding a woman who they thought might be Gail at the World Trade Center. The police report notes that Bierenbaum "seemed annoyed that I had called him at that hour"—2:30 A.M.—"and was reluctant to respond."

The new team of investigators uncovered a damning piece of evidence. They learned that on the afternoon of Gail's disappearance Bierenbaum had rented a plane in Caldwell, New Jersey—a Cessna 172N, with a baggage allowance of a hundred and twenty pounds—and flown it for nearly two hours. Bierenbaum had told the police that he'd spent the day waiting for Gail to come home, then had driven to his sister's house in New Jersey for his nephew's birthday party. He never mentioned a plane flight. "That was huge in our minds," one investigator said. "How do you make that omission?"

Bierenbaum's lawyer, Scott Greenfield, says that his client flew the plane to clear his head after his argument with Gail, and that he never mentioned the flight to the police simply because Detective O'Malley did an "exceptionally poor job" of asking about his whereabouts on the day of the disappearance.

When police technicians were finally given permission, in 1987, to examine the rented plane and the cars that Bierenbaum might have driven on the day Gail disappeared, combing them for blood and tissue, they found nothing, however. The prosecutors decided that without more substantial physical evidence they couldn't seek an indictment, and the case file went into the archives.

In May, 1989, the police found a torso washed up near the piers on Front Street, in Staten Island. It displayed surgical cut marks at the shoulders and pelvis and, although it was badly decomposed, appeared to be that of a white female between thirty and forty years of age. In

August, an expert radiologist compared X-rays of the torso with old X-rays of Gail. He determined that "both sets of films are of Gail Katz." Her missing-person case was officially termed a homicide, and the torso was buried in the Katz family plot in Queens. The Katzes informed Bierenbaum, through his lawyer, that he would not be welcome at the funeral; he did not attend. But he did sit shivah at home. A few months later, he moved to Las Vegas.

In 1997, Andrew Rosenzweig, the chief investigator in the Manhattan district attorney's office, decided to dust off a couple of unsolved cases that had always bothered him. The following April, Rosenzweig and an investigator named Tommy Pon flew to Las Vegas for four days to interview Bierenbaum's friends, colleagues, and former employees there. That trip, of course, was the one that inspired Bob's ex-girlfriends to have their first sleuthing session at the Mayflower. The investigators hoped that Bierenbaum would have confessed to a Las Vegas girlfriend; Suzanne, Jenny, and Miranda hoped that the investigators would tell them everything about Bob's past. Neither group was rewarded with precisely the information it had hoped for. But the private suspicions of the women Bierenbaum had dated and the public suspicions of the state were finally linked: both sets of detectives began to borrow from each other's stories and conjectures, braiding them together into a coherent narrative that made sense to everybody.

According to someone who was involved in the official investigation, the interviews with Suzanne Kogan and Miranda Collier "added to things we knew, helped fill in the profile—is he capable of violence, of murder?" Miranda's account of being afraid of Bob, so similar to Gail's, "is the kind of testimony that can have an effect on a jury," and Suzanne's story of her first date "added to our suspicion. His not sharing any details, first, and then his shock at her joke—'Did you kill her?' It connoted someone who'd had a nerve struck."

Although the investigators were careful to appear open-minded, they had a tidy working profile of Bierenbaum—"He has to control everything, but the rage can't be suppressed," one member of the prosecution team told me—and a strong belief in his guilt. The Harriets, who actually knew Bob, had neither. But they were beginning to change their minds. Indeed, once the investigators came to town, the Las Vegas medical community began to reassess affable, civic-minded Bob Bierenbaum. Some of his doctor friends did rise to his defense, however. "Bob doesn't have any capability for that kind of act," Dr. Charles Vinnik told me. "The investigators were interviewing people who barely knew Bob, spreading rumors, and then interviewing people who'd heard those rumors. It was like Chinese whispers."

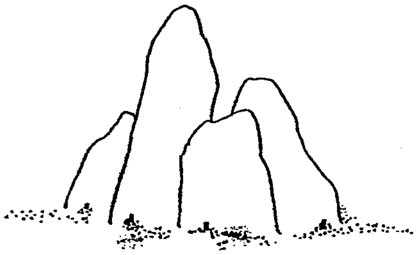
It wasn't quite that simple. For instance, when the investigators spoke to Dr. Douglas Seip, who co-owned Bierenbaum's plane, they never said that Bob was under suspicion. But they did ask Seip what sort of luggage Bob carried, what might fit into a small plane. They were trying to work out their theory: that Bob had strangled Gail, cut her up with surgical expertise, put the body parts into a bag, and dropped them from the plane into the Atlantic.

Seip drew the obvious conclusions from the questioning, and he mentioned the investigators' suspicions to his assistant, Rod. While Rod was getting some work done by a surgeon named Dr. Resto, for whom Bierenbaum's former office manager Laurie Francis now works, he mentioned the dismemberment idea to her. Laurie then called Sharon Nicholson, her predecessor in Bierenbaum's office, and they chatted about the ramifications of the inferred, thirdhand, get-the-body-past-the-doorman conundrum.

"I think he killed her in the bathtub," Laurie said.

"I could see that, because he's so anal he wouldn't want the cleanup," Sharon agreed. "But maybe he killed her somewhere else in the apartment—he got mad, it was a mistake—and then dragged her to the tub."

Both of the investigations, official and unofficial, were proceeding along the same lines, using inductive rather than deductive reasoning. They started with snippets about Bierenbaum's character, and then tried to make the pieces of the puzzle fit.



Naturally, in such an atmosphere, rumors flourished, because they were more satisfying than the uncertain facts of the case. Once, when she was dating Bob, Suzanne had broken a glass while she was unloading his dishwasher. "He started raging," she recalls. "He said, 'This is one of a set, and I can't replace it!' It was just a glass. I pulled eight dollars out of my purse and gave it to him. 'Here, Bob—happy now?' " Suzanne mentioned the incident to her mother, and by the time Barb recounted it to me it had become, "He got violent with her one night and broke glasses!"

The investigators had gone to North Dakota, and on November 30, 1998, they confronted Bob outside his clinic, hoping that the news that they were still investigating Gail's murder would startle him into making a telling remark. But Bob swiftly invoked his right to counsel, and he hasn't spoken with the police or prosecutors since. (Nor would he speak with me.) As this brief encounter passed from source to source, it was embellished until it took on the proportions of "Darkness at Noon." Last June, Laurie Francis E-mailed me: "The other day I heard from someone who works for a local attorney who is/was friends with Bob Bierenbaum that after four interrogations, he had broken down and confessed and that he had been taken into custody within the past month."

At around the same time, Jenny heard from Suzanne, who'd heard from a cardiologist that the police had found parts of Gail's body cemented into the walls of the couple's Manhattan apartment. Jenny tracked the rumor back to the cardiologist's husband, who'd heard it from an anesthesiologist, who'd heard, somewhere, that Bierenbaum had confessed on "60 Minutes." Jenny sent an E-mail to "60 Minutes" seeking confirmation, but—as no such thing had happened—got no reply. So Suzanne called the clinic in North Dakota and had Bierenbaum paged, to see if he was in custody. When he answered, she hung up.

Last fall, the rumors dwindled, because a verifiable event was under way: a New York State grand jury had begun hearing testimony about Bierenbaum from a multitude of witnesses, including Miranda Collier. (Suzanne was asked to testify but declined.) In early December, the grand jury indicted Bierenbaum for the second-degree murder of his wife, a crime that carries a penalty of twenty-five years to life in prison.

At the arraignment in New York State Supreme Court on December 9, 1999, one of the prosecutors, Stephen Saracco, charged that Bierenbaum "murdered [Gail] in the apartment, that he packaged her body," that he dumped her remains out of a plane, and that "her body still lies on the bottom of the ocean," somewhere between Montauk Point and Cape May. This last claim startled many of those in Las Vegas who had been part of the gossip chain: what about the torso?

When the case was reactivated, the medical examiner had the torso exhumed and ordered DNA tests. In September, 1998, the lab determined that the DNA from the torso did not match the DNA in Gail's sister's blood. The biggest break in the story, the famous torso, had proved to be a red herring.

One gray afternoon in late January, I finally saw the man I had heard so much about. Bierenbaum, who is out on five hundred thousand dollars' bail and living at his parents' house in West Orange, New Jersey, came to the New York State Supreme Court building for a brief status hearing on the trial, which is scheduled to begin on September 7th. He got out of a car wearing a tan raincoat, a blue suit, and small horn-rimmed glasses. As a squad of cameramen surged and blocked his path, Bierenbaum's face remained fixed and blank. In court, he sat with his parents and his wife, Janet. The hearing took two minutes. Scott Greenfield filed the customary motion to dismiss charges—a motion that would be denied three months later—and then everyone filed out.

When I looked at my notes, I realized that Bierenbaum had never said a word, not even to his family. (Nor, after a court appearance in April, would he say anything when Alayne Katz confronted him in front of two TV cameramen as he waited for the courthouse elevators. "Bob, fifteen years I'm waiting to hear you tell me that you didn't kill my sister!" she said. Frowning, he spun away from her.) I also realized that, with so much in dispute, a jury might not be certain, beyond a reasonable doubt, that Bob Bierenbaum killed his wife.

In court filings, the prosecutors acknowledge that their evidence is "wholly circumstantial." And a sizable portion of it is testimony about the oddities and anomalies of Bob's behavior; that is, state-certified gossip. When I visited Scott Greenfield in his office recently, he seized on this problem: "Let's assume the Bierenbaums had a terrible marriage. And let's assume, for the sake of argument, that Bob almost drowned a cat, that he strangled Gail to unconsciousness, and that some of the women he later dated believe him to be capable of killing her. Still, what has any of that got to do with what happened on July 7th?"

Alayne Katz believes it has everything to do with it. "Bob did a wonderful job of disposing of the physical evidence," she told me. "But what was left behind was his personality—and he couldn't cover that up."

The night before the arraignment, a prosecutor called Suzanne Kogan in Las Vegas to tell her that Bob's arrest was imminent. To confirm that he'd been taken into custody, she phoned Bierenbaum's clinic in Minot to ask for an appointment, and was told that no appointments were being accepted for the indefinite future. The next day, after the court hearing, Jenny went on-line and typed "Bierenbaum" and "murder" into Yahoo!'s search engine, and was rewarded at long last: there was a wire-service story about the court proceedings.

That night, Suzanne set up a conference call among the Harriets. Suzanne and Miranda commiserated because everyone was asking them, "Say, weren't you and Bob, um . . . ?" Then they all grew a little shy. "The mood had changed from that of an exciting parlor game to a scary, real thing," Jenny told me. "It had gone from Bob as a *story* to Bob the *person*. We weren't saying 'How did he package her?' anymore, but 'Will he go to jail?' and 'He has a baby now.' " She looked deeply unhappy. "I feel sorry for him, and I feel bad for having this prurient interest in him, for spying. I mean, typing 'Bierenbaum' and 'murder' on Yahoo!—there must be something wrong with me, too." ♦

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THE POLITICAL SCENE

GORE WITHOUT A SCRIPT

What would happen if we saw the man he really is?

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN

Toward the end of his political career, Senator Albert Gore, Sr., wrote a couple of books, one on the eve of the 1970 Senate campaign and the other, which was longer and told a bit more "with the bark on," as they say in Tennessee, a couple of years later. To read them now is to be taken back to a time in American politics when notes were struck that nobody strikes anymore.

Senator Gore grew up on a struggling farm in the hills of middle Tennessee. In the evenings, the family would sit around a kerosene lamp, and the father would talk about his hero—William Jennings Bryan, the Great Commoner. Senator Gore managed to cobble together an education for himself over many years, by working his way first through a local teachers' college, then a night law school conducted at the Y.M.C.A. in Nashville. It was there that he met his wife, Pauline, who was working her way through Vanderbilt Law School by waiting on tables in a coffee shop in the evenings. Gore's first full-time job, as a schoolteacher, paid seventy-five dollars a month.

The Depression hit the Gore family very hard. Senator Gore's father, fearing for the stability of the local banks in Smith County, Tennessee, divided his savings among three of them. All three failed, and he lost everything. When the future Senator's father went to sell his crops that year, he made eighty-nine dollars, and Gore remembered the scene of "grown men who were so desperate the tears streamed down their cheeks as they stood with me at the window to receive their meager checks for a full year's work." During that time, George H. W. Bush, the father of this year's other Presidential candidate, was a student at Greenwich Country Day School, to which he was driven every morning by his family's chauffeur.

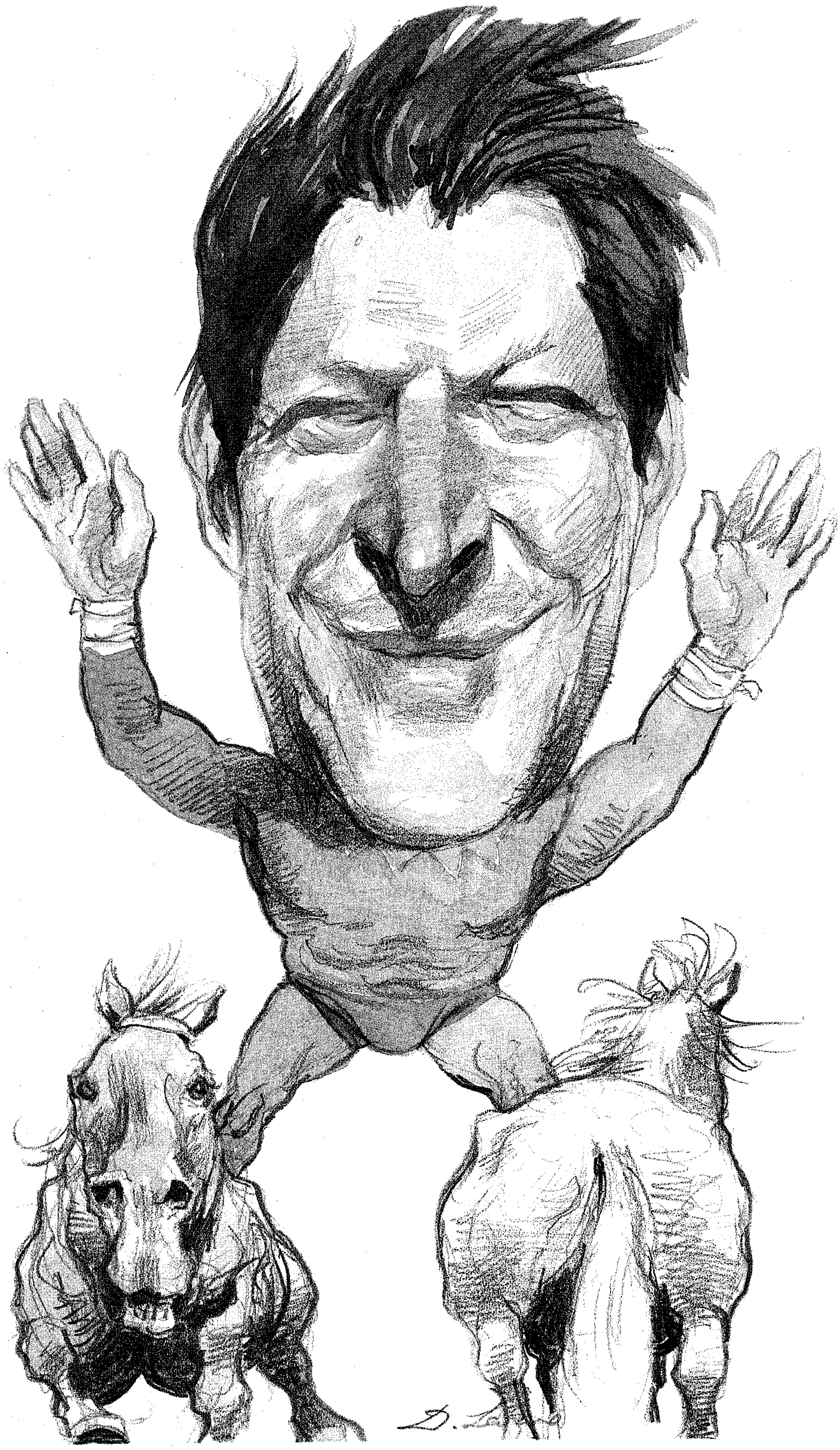
Salvation arrived, in the form of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal. F.D.R. brought electricity to rural Tennessee. F.D.R. proposed higher taxes on corporations and the rich. F.D.R. made a speech about the South in which he said, "When you come right down to it, there is little difference between the feudal system and the fascist system." Gore was elected to the United States Congress, and later to the Senate, where he fought constantly against tax cuts, privatization, tight money, Wall Street, and the Federal Reserve Board. When, for example, he heard that John F. Kennedy, the newly elected President, was going to appoint a Wall Street man, C. Douglas Dillon, as Secretary of the Treasury, he retreated to his farm in Carthage, Tennessee, and wrote Kennedy a blistering letter, warning that "such an appointment would be a signal that you had given up the goals of a truly Democratic Administration." Gore's oldest granddaughter, Karenna Gore Schiff, remembers him once introducing her to a new farmhand who hesitated to shake her hand because his was dirty. Gore laughed and motioned for her to shake hands anyway, advising her to say, "That's all right—I'm a Democrat."

Gore lost his seat in 1970, to a rising young man of the Republican Party, Bill Brock. The race was widely seen as a last hurrah for old-fashioned Southern populism. In Tennessee, the Democratic Party, which had dominated state politics for all of living memory, and which, indeed, had practically been invented in Tennessee (Andrew Jackson lived within a hundred miles of where Senator Gore was born), seemed to have expired practically overnight. In 1966, the Republicans took one of Tennessee's Senate seats. In 1970, they took the other, and the governorship, too. The old dream of Southern liberals, which animates Senator Gore's writings, was that if they could ever kill off the Jim Crow system blacks and poor whites could make common, populist cause against the Bourbons and their moneyed allies in New York. Now Jim Crow was dead, and the opposite was happening: the white South was going Republican. Gore saw his last race as a primal struggle between good and evil; in his post-defeat book, he approvingly quotes David Halberstam, who wrote, in *Harper's,* of Brock's campaign slogan, "Bill Brock Believes": "Believes is the code word for Nigger."

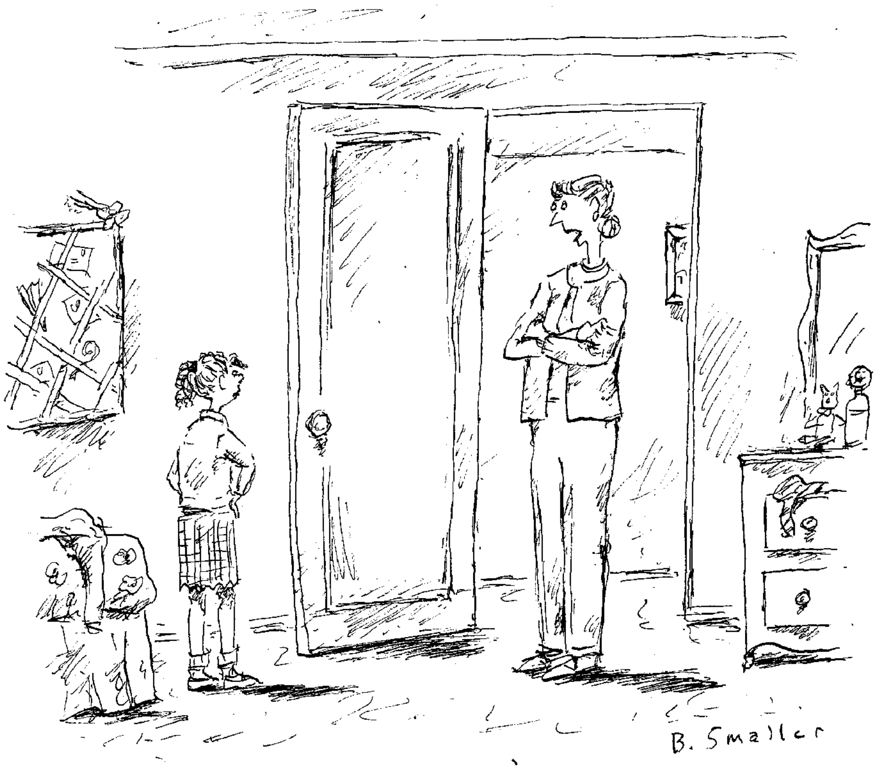
From the Democratic point of view, the Party was the victim of its own success. By taxing and spending, it had managed to get some money into the hands of the flat-busted country farmers of the Depression South. Now they were doing better, beyond their dreams, really, and a lot of their children weren't farmers anymore. They had gone to college, thanks to programs the Democrats had passed, and modern industry had come to the South, thanks to the Democrats' ending segregation and building dams and power plants and highways (Albert Gore was the chief sponsor of the bill that created the interstate-highway system), and they had white-collar jobs and were living in new houses in the suburbs—and voting Republican.

Not long ago in Nashville, I went to see James Neal, the former Watergate prosecutor, who has been a friend of the Gore family since the nineteen-fifties and is now the lawyer for Al Gore, in the matter of his fund-raising in 1996. He told me that when he was growing up—the son of a middle-Tennessee farmer, in a house with no indoor plumbing—his father used to point out to him a man named Roark who lived in their part of the country, and say, "Look, son! There's a Republican!" Neal was telling me this story in his office, on the twentieth floor of a plate-glass Nashville skyscraper. He was wearing bluejeans and scuffed boots and chewing on an unlit cigar that looked about a foot long. "He must have pointed that guy out to me twenty times," Neal said. "It was like he was a man with two heads. Now I see these

DAVID LEVINE



Gore's political life has been about trying to reconcile the populist tradition that he was born into with the world of the New Democrats.



"Your attitude is sucking all the fulfillment out of motherhood."

people out in Brentwood who drive a Lexus, who belong to my country club, and they curse the government. And I sit and listen to them! Drive a Lexus and condemn the party that got you there. That's what it amounts to."

If you drive the fifty miles from Nashville out to Carthage, the plain little town that is still the Gore family seat, you see that almost everything built in the last forty years is grander than almost everything built before then, and that the new construction—the malls and the subdivisions—is creeping out toward Carthage. Nissan and Saturn have built factories not too far away, something inconceivable in the stone-agrarian South of the Depression. In the 1996 Presidential election, the hapless Dole-Kemp ticket was just one point behind in Al Gore's old congressional district.

This isn't just a regional story, or one of particular interest because of who is running for President. Most of the dominant national politicians of the past decade are people whose formative experience as young politicians was in figuring out how to play the South's abrupt and dramatic shift from Democratic to Republican. This is the story of George H. W. Bush's political life, and of George W. Bush's, and of Jeb Bush's, and of Newt Gingrich's and Dick Armey's and Tom DeLay's—they were in the rising group; and then in the falling group, the one that had to deal with the foundation's being knocked out from under it, are Bill Clinton and Al Gore. Gore's entire political life has been about trying to survive within a tradition that he was born into and watched die. In that situation, you either become very, very nimble or very, very careful. Al Gore himself once wrote, "I grew up in a determinedly political family, in which I learned at an early age to be very sensitive—too sensitive, perhaps—to what others were thinking, and to notice carefully—maybe too carefully—the similarities and differences between my way of thinking and that of the society around me."

At least in his writings, Albert Gore, Sr., always insisted that the South could be the most liberal region of the country and that the post-civil-rights return to economic populism was still on the way. In one of his books, though, he did make a concession to changing times. He proposed passing the torch to a new type of populist:

> This reconstruction of our country from within calls for guidance by men who live neither in the memories of the past nor in the emotions of the present; it calls for guidance by *men who are pre-eminently thinkers, men* who, let it be said very simply, are concerned with a future-oriented understanding of things—it calls for guidance, if you will, by the intellectuals who over the years have voiced many of the latent convictions and beliefs of the poor and downtrodden.

Al Gore was intimately involved in his father's last campaign and therefore in the final bitterness of it. He travelled with the old man. When his father decided that he needed to buy television ads, Gore appeared in them, wearing a military uniform and being told, "Son, always love your country." Although Gore's service in Vietnam is usually held up as an example of his devotion to his father—he enlisted in part because it seemed required by the 1970 campaign—Halberstam's article in *Harper's* suggests that the father might actually have liked the idea of running a campaign alongside a son who refused to go to Vietnam. But when changing times took out the elder Gore the younger one had to play his ambitions quite differently. What the father wrote about the advent of an emotionless, intellectual, futurist strain of populist would have been the script—and, beneath Al Gore's many protective layers, it remains the script, as I discovered when I was able to talk with him. He displayed a degree of thoughtfulness and study, and also of abstraction from the daily world, that is astonishing in a Presidential candidate in mid-campaign.

In the middle of June, Al Gore unveiled a new theme for his Presidential campaign in a speech at the New-York Historical Society, on the West Side of Manhattan. If you haven't spent time in the vicinity of a sitting Vice-President of the United States—in White House lingo, a V-POTUS—it's surprising how much apparatus is involved. Air Force Two sits on the runway at LaGuardia, city streets get closed off, police are everywhere outside and Secret Service everywhere inside. You have to arrive an hour ahead of time. Dogs have to sniff you before you can sit in the audience. This has the effect of raising the ante on Gore, wherever he goes—you feel that for all this trouble you should get a big payoff.

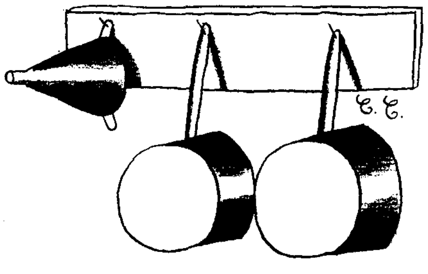
But on this particular day, after the audience had been assembled and had sat waiting for a good while in the auditorium, Gore merely ambled onstage from the wings, accompanied by Robert Rubin, the former co-chairman of Goldman, Sachs and former Secretary of the Treasury, who is now with Citigroup, and who also ambled. The Democratic Party had made peace with Wall Street. Gore's new campaign theme was Prosperity and Progress. There was a logo behind the lectern with those words printed repeatedly across a map of the United States. Gore sat in a chair, motionless as a wax figure, while Rubin introduced him, stressing the role Gore had played in a project that his father had not considered very worthy during his officeholding days: eliminating the federal deficit.

I had been watching Gore speak all spring. He has held elective office continuously for twenty-four years, so he has an enormous amount of experience at this. Still, it obviously doesn't come naturally to him. He is poised, he has a rich, booming voice, but he doesn't often "inhabit the role," in the acting sense; instead, every move seems calculated and practiced. I kept thinking of that early scene in "Terminator 2," when Arnold Schwarzenegger, as a cyborg, walks into a biker bar, and a digital readout flashes across the inside of his eyelids, giving height, weight, and build of each person he sees. Similarly, you can see Gore read a situation, pause while the script flashes, formulate his response—and then react. He has an odd quality of taking in what he's seeing with an almost digitalized exactitude (that's why, in private, he's supposed to be a gifted mimic), while appearing to be oblivious. Rubin, at one point in his introduction, glanced fondly over at Gore. Gore froze, got the readout (*Introducer interacting with V-POTUS. Must respond*), smiled broadly, and then went back into the waxworks.

Gore has two basic modes when he gives speeches. One is meant to play as "high energy" and the other as statesmanlike. In high-energy mode, he speaks in a Southern accent and takes the stage at a trot. He pivots his body from side to side, bouncing a little on the balls of his feet, and gestures with both hands; all this makes it look as if his hands were controlled by one puppeteer and his body by another. In statesmanlike mode, he has no accent, he walks, and he stands behind a lectern making rolling gestures with one hand. On this day, he was in a kind of enhanced version of statesmanlike: he spoke more peppily than usual, and he used a teleprompter, but his face was like a block and his rhetoric was full of village-elder words like "discipline," "conscience," "decency," "security," "responsibility," and "trust." Then, at the end, he pumped it up a little. When he perorates, Gore slows down his delivery and lowers his voice to a stage whisper. "We will win this fight!" he said. "We will not rest! Hear me now!" When he finished, the song "You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet" came loudly over the speaker system and he walked out from behind the lectern and shook hands for a while. The speech he had delivered was to the word identical with the text his staff had handed out. It was impossible to leave the room with the feeling that you had been brought into the intimate presence of the real Al Gore.

Gore went off somewhere for the rest of the afternoon, and after dinner he flew to Scranton, Pennsylvania, the next leg of the Prosperity and Progress tour. The event on his schedule was one of the great boilerplate items in Presidential politics, a rally at an airport hangar. I arrived before Gore, in a plane the campaign had chartered for the travelling press. Some of us joined a good-sized crowd in the hangar, and others of us decided to skip the event and go out for dinner. A loudspeaker was playing the kind of up-tempo, glass-rattling anthems that you hear over the sound system at major-league baseball games. Most of the people there were white, middle-aged, and middle class, and they didn't seem at all put out to be waiting around in a hangar for Gore to arrive. It's not every day that you see the Vice-President of the United States up close.

One reason Gore had come here was that there was a very close local race for state representative, a special election that would put the Democrats one seat away from a majority in the Pennsylvania legislature, and that would affect redistricting. There was a podium set up, and the candidate for state representative got up and spoke. His name was Jim Wansacz, and he was twenty-eight years old—just about the same age as Al Gore when he made his first run for office. Wansacz's father had held the same seat years earlier, and now the son was trying to get it back. He seemed impossibly young and raw, out of place in the suit he was wearing, like a boy at his First Communion. He got up and spoke, hoarsely, with a desperate energy, waving his arms, about how much he loved his mother and father—he didn't seem to feel the need, and neither did the audience, for public-policy talk. As he got a little way into how wonderful his parents were, he started to cry. Then he changed the subject to Al Gore. "He came to *our* area!" Wansacz shouted. "He cares about the same issues *we* care about!"



It turned out that several of the politicians in the hangar that night were the scions of political families. Besides Jim Wansacz and Al Gore, there was an Eisenhower (a distant cousin of Dwight) who was running for state attorney general, and two sons of Bob Casey, the former governor of Pennsylvania (he died earlier this year), one of whom is Pennsylvania's auditor general, the other of whom is running for the U.S. House of Representatives. It was possible to imagine, watching the scene, that the dreams of Albert Gore, Sr., had come true: the children of the miners and factory workers and farmers of his day had become teachers and firefighters, and they were still Democrats. And the children of the old populist politicians were New Democrats, but still fighting, delivering a new kind of public goods to their people, preschool and prescription drugs instead of electricity and running water and banks that wouldn't fail.

Air Force Two landed, taxied, and parked so as to be perfectly framed in the doorway of the hangar, fifty yards away. Various people emerged from the plane, limousines materialized on the runway, the ballpark music came up, and then there was a long, long pause. Finally, Gore appeared in the doorway of the plane. He stopped, waved, walked down the stairway, and then ran at a dead sprint across the runway to the hangar. It may sound corny, but if you were there it was really exciting, the spotlighted Vice-President running toward you. The crowd cheered, and Gore mounted the podium. He seemed relaxed and happy, even though it must have been a brutally long day for him. In a deep Southern accent, he said that Tipper says hello and that they had just celebrated their thirtieth wedding anniversary. Had anybody else been married thirty years? That's great. And we just became grandparents for the first time. Any other grandparents here?

Gore was speaking into a handheld microphone, without a script, lustily promising things—prescription-drug benefits, family leave, better-behaving H.M.O.s, better schools, help with college tuition. "Ah'm just gettin' warmed up," he said after a few minutes. "Ah think ah'm gon' take mah coat off." And on and on he went with the strong economy and the way he was gon' put Medicare in a lockbox where Congress couldn't mess with it. In the windup, he let his voice break a little and pranced across the stage, and then he plunged into the crowd to shake hands.

A limousine pulled near to drive Gore away. He handshook his way over to it, and somebody opened a door for him. Then something peculiar happened. Gore turned and looked back at the hangar and the podium, frozen for a long moment in silhouette against the spotlights. It was as if two invisible strings were pulling him in opposite directions, the limo and the hangar. Suddenly, with an air of wild release, he ran back to the podium, leaped up the stairs, spread his arms exultantly, and absorbed wave after gratifying wave of the unconditional love of the crowd. He dismounted and went back to the handshaking in a near-frenzy, circumnavigating the entire hangar, for twenty, thirty, forty minutes. Often when Gore appears in public, people start quietly slipping out of the room after a while. This time nobody was about to leave before he did.

Some of the reporters had a cynical interpretation of what we were seeing. The Gore campaign had hired a film crew to shoot this event for possible use in advertisements: never believe that Gore is capable of spontaneity. Even so, it was an electric moment, the only one I ever saw on the Gore campaign—the only one where Gore seemed like a real politician, instead of somebody trying very hard to play the part of a politician.

By the next morning, the electricity was gone. The local bishop had cancelled a Gore event on health care scheduled for the following day at a Catholic hospital, because Gore favors legal abortion. The lead story in the Scranton *Times-Tribune* was about how, at the airport hangar, Gore had mistakenly referred to Jim Wansacz by his father's name, John. The *Times*, where Gore had stopped to meet with the senior editors and reporters on his way to the speech at the New-York Historical Society, as part of the kickoff of the Prosperity and Progress tour, printed excerpts of the conversation that made it clear he had come across poorly, having answered questions by delivering little speeches on tangentially related topics.

The Gore campaign had hastily lined up another hospital for the event, but there were protesters outside with signs saying "George W. Bush for President" and "Stop the Killing of Unborn Babies."

HOPS

When the drunk at the bar of the Royal Oak
glared into my face,
gripping his pint like a hand grenade
from which he'd just taken the pin,
and told me what he told me,

the pang I felt
was like the split that goes on riving
all the way down the trunk
from one sound blow to the wedge,
as though it had been there forever, waiting.

That was the last time I felt at home
in a country pub, therefore England;
that, for me, being England—
that badger-set gloom
with its little church organ of bottles and pumps,

where a dim light from the sconce lamps
tools the unfakable ease
on figures who belong there,
simply, set on their stools like chessmen,
as calmly set in their ways,

while over the burrowy stalings of pipe smoke, yeast,
ancestral piss from the gents
flares the bitter, freshening smell of hops,
feudal and vital; the inexhaustible gold dust
of the true Anglican host.

I worked on the neighboring farm one summer,
hop picking with a crew of Gypsies.
The twelve-acre pole-and-wire trellises,
diagrammatic in spring,
had spurted their vines:

ten thousand living maypoles
in a haze of hop dust.
We hacked our way down the rows,

bundling tangled armfuls
into the stripping and sorting machines.

The clustering bracts
were sticky as flypaper:
little papery pouches of yellow snuff.
We stuffed them into burlap sacks,
then hauled them off to the ovens.

Two weeks into the season
the head-dazing, sour-gold smell
was in us like our own spoor;
we moved through the drifts of late summer
sweating it like the musk of hop gods.

We were the gods of that place if anyone was:
the stubble-gold shire streaming through us;
in sleep, crashed out under oak trees,
our sticky hands still sorting
the gold-filled, bunched, shrunken heads.

Albion juju,
I was full of it then:
Malory, Holinshed,
King John's sunk ducats
sifting from gold to sand

to hop pollen.
I'm exorcising it now
with a backwoods ghost-fragrance
of birch beer and applejack
on a barn porch under black locusts

where thumb-sized hummingbirds
zoom through the crimson bee balm
and whenever I move my pen
a fountain of goldfinches
splashes out of the bushes.

—*James Lasdun*

The triumphant visit to Scranton had become the controversial visit to Scranton. Inside, Gore conducted a town meeting, the kind of event his staff thinks he's best at, with a group of doctors and nurses. His Southern accent was gone. Whenever he had to mention someone's name, he bore down on it, clearly trying to avoid his mistake of the night before. He seemed to be straining to connect. Every time somebody asked a question, Gore would walk over and stand close, making intense eye contact and nodding slowly to show that he understood. Then, after the question had been asked, he would stroll to the middle of the stage and deliver his answer to the whole audience. It was a technique that probably made theoretical sense, but it seemed awfully forced when you were watching it.

One doctor asked Gore about malpractice, beginning with an amiable dig—vintage locker-room-of-the-hospital stuff—about Gore's being a lawyer. You could see the readout on Gore's eyelids: *All doctors hate lawyers. Must reassure subject. V-POTUS not lawyer. V-POTUS journalist.* "Actually, I did not wind up becoming a lawyer," Gore said. "I wound up becoming a newspaper reporter." Actually, Gore left being a full-time newspaper reporter to go to law school, and then left law school to run for Congress. This is the kind of exaggeration he falls into when he's forcing his game, trying to ingratiate himself in a way that obviously isn't real—the kind that, if anybody catches him at it, can be presented as one of his "lies."

Before the event was scheduled to end, people stopped raising their hands. "I seem to have exhausted the questions and comments," Gore said evenly. He went into a few closing remarks, the ballpark music came up, he shook a few hands, and then he ducked out.

The familiar idea that Gore is stiff in public but funny and relaxed in private is within range of the truth, yet it doesn't capture the full strangeness of the situation. On rare occasions, he can be wonderful in public. I caught a glimpse of that in Scranton. Gore's friends like to cite a few other examples. There was a tour of the Western states at the end of the 1992 Presidential campaign when every stop seemed to draw an adoring crowd, and you could feel the impending victory. There was his fiftieth-birthday party, at which k.d. lang, dressed in a tuxedo, vampily sang "Happy Birthday, Mr. Vice-President," parodying Marilyn Monroe's famous serenade to J.F.K., while Tipper Gore feigned jealousy and Gore feigned temptation (the joke being that lang is gay). There was the eloquent eulogy he delivered for his father, in 1998. Earlier this year, an old friend of his named Jerry Thompson, a columnist for the Nashville *Tennessean,* died during the runup to the New Hampshire primary, a crucial event for Gore. He cleared his schedule, flew to Nashville for two days, and delivered a great, heartfelt speech.

Gore can also be stiff and lifeless in private. "Every time you see him, it's almost like you're meeting him for the first time," one old friend says. He is incapable of making small talk. And it gets even stranger. A political consultant who had been involved in several winning Senate campaigns in the 1998 elections went up to Capitol Hill to watch his clients being sworn in when the new congressional session opened. Gore, as presiding officer of the Senate, appears at these ceremonies. At the first swearing-in, the consultant thought, Ah, finally I'm getting to see the famous loose, funny Gore, the genuinely attractive and charming figure. At the next swearing-in, Gore was precisely the same, joke for joke, gesture for gesture, as if his central processing unit were performing a subroutine that he had loaded in earlier in the day. The same thing happened at the next swearing-in, and the next, and the next—not the minutest variation. So there isn't as much difference between loose and funny and stiff and formal as it may appear.

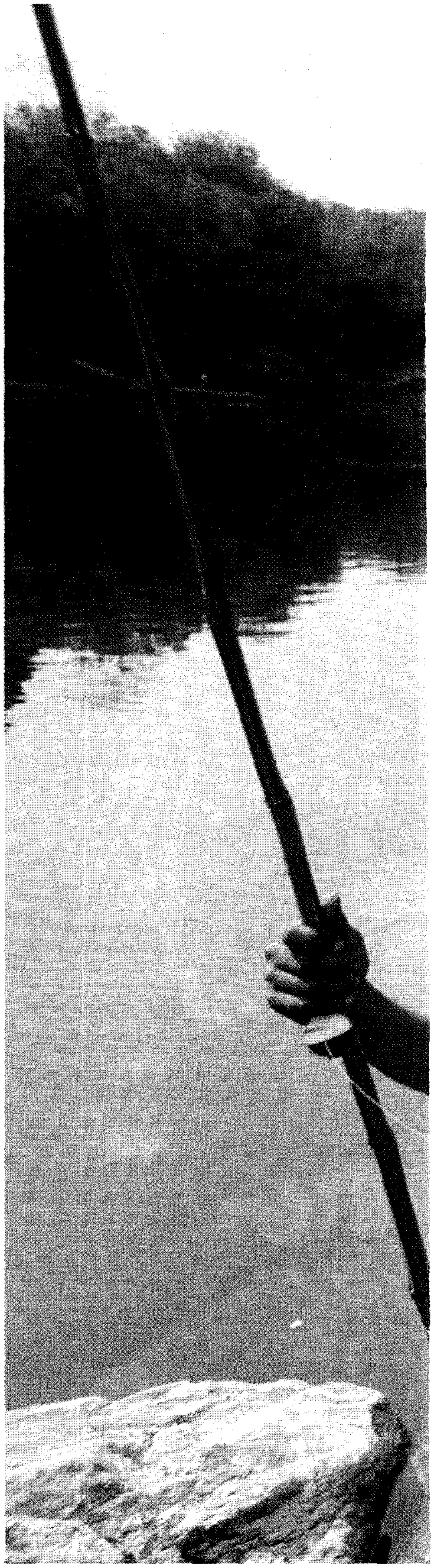
Gore sometimes switches modes in midstream, too, in public and in private. He lacks any middle range. He'll be speaking animatedly, and then, as if a great, grinding railyard switch is being thrown, he'll abruptly shut down and become lifeless. What seems to trigger this is an internal risk sensor, which, once activated, causes him to become overwhelmingly cautious. An invitation to say something impolitic, to give an opinion on an issue where offending an interest group whose support he wants seems unavoidable, and he's gone, into a territory of bland, well-tested sloganeering.

The phenomenon is self-reinforcing. Gore's painfully high self-awareness, his impulse to think rather than feel his way through a situation, leads to an excessively controlled presentation. (Even when he is evidently at ease, he speaks very formally, as I found out when I met him.) People notice those qualities, and conclude that he's condescending, or not paying attention, or even being actively hostile. They react by finding little ways to zing him—the reporters who travel with him, palpably seething over how controlled the environment is, do this a lot, finding new exaggerations and material for "campaign in trouble" stories—and Gore then retreats even further. Besides being a good public speaker, a high-level politician has to have a capacity for brief face-to-face interactions that leave the other person all aglow, convinced that there's a real relationship there. Gore is able to do this, but often, inexplicably, he doesn't. A common story you hear about Gore involves somebody's meeting him, being charmed and impressed (nobody in politics has more earnestly good impulses), developing what feels like a friendship, and then having a painful encounter in which Gore has, without warning, become an automaton, a man who speaks in a sonorous official tone about the positions of the Clinton-Gore Administration, the way an adult would speak to a child, or who answers heartfelt correspondence with a form letter. Gore has a closer family life and fewer real friends than most Washington figures of his eminence; people who think of themselves as acquaintances, and think that Gore treats them as such, will sometimes be surprised to hear that he has described them to someone else as intimates.

Another thing the best politicians do is attract a cadre of true believers, who work for them in a spirit of nearly religious devotion. Gore has one person like this in his upper echelon of advisers—Leon Fuerth, his foreign-policy aide, who had early training as an engineer, is so precise, diligent, and guarded, speaking not just in perfect sentences but in perfect paragraphs, that he makes his boss look like Jim Carrey. Most of the others around Gore as he runs for President are professionals, people who have won their battle stars in the Democratic Party but have no special connection to him. Even his closest campaign adviser, Carter Eskew, who has known him since 1973 and was brought into the Presidential campaign only last spring in connection with a shakeup, made it clear when I talked to him that his personal relationship with Gore is on hold until November, and that for now he is hired help.

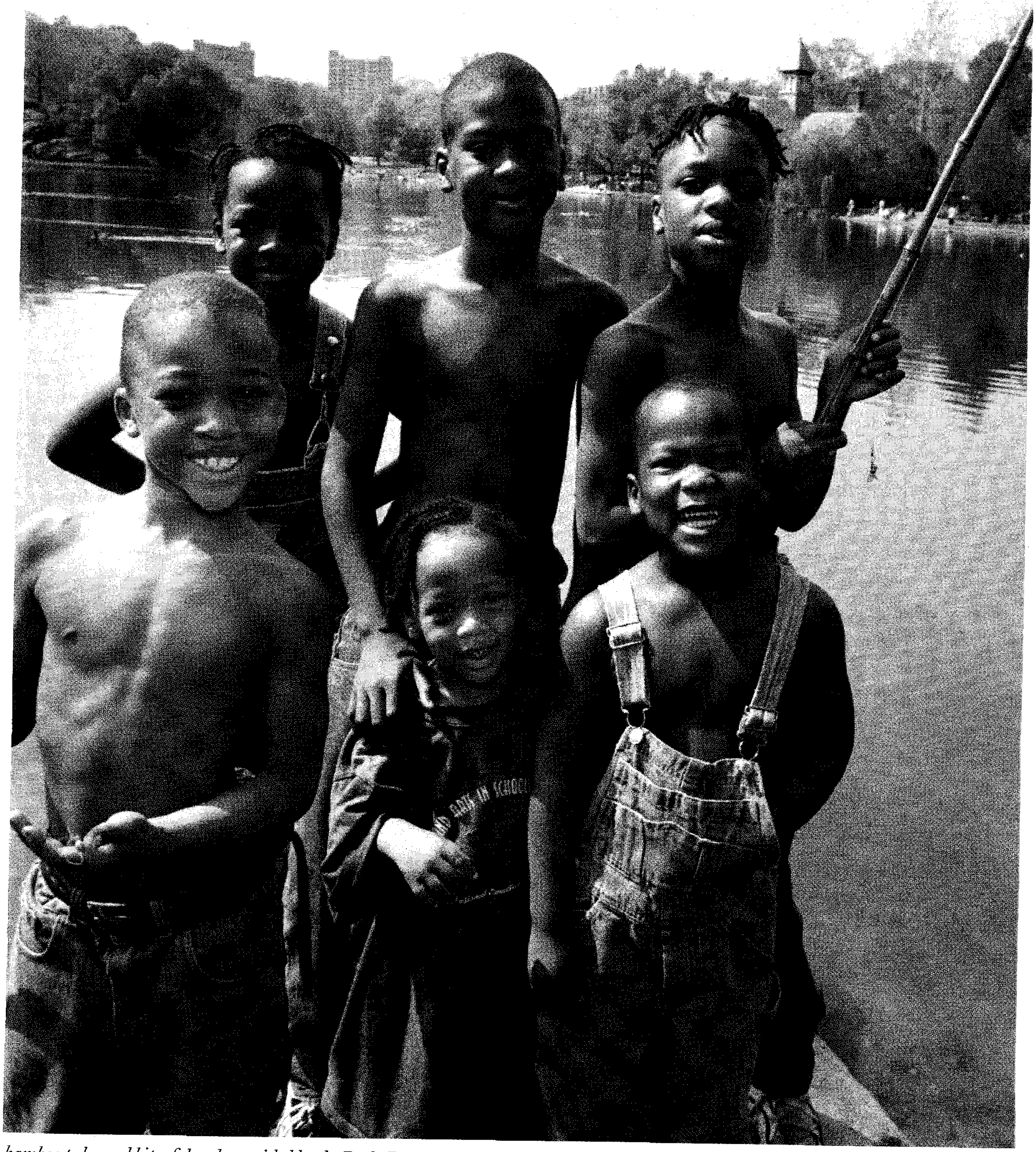
People who travel with a Presidential campaign often refer to it half jokingly as the "bubble," meaning that it is an extraordinarily controlled, unnatural environment, and you never quite know where it's taking you next, or what's going on in the outside world, and you're constantly being watched. It's an apt analogy, which might be extended by saying that Al Gore is a "bubble boy," like those immunodeficient kids who are a staple of *People* and made-for-TV movies. He has been an elected official in the federal government since he was twenty-eight years old. Even before he was a congressman, Gore was a young prince, widely seen by his family and close friends as a potential President.

Bill Kovach, the recently retired curator of the Nieman Foundation, at Harvard, who was originally a journalist in Tennessee, remembers meeting the



SHOWCASE BY BRUCE DAVIDSON *With*
But the Meer's pumpkinseed sunfish, golden shiners,

MAGNUM



bamboo poles and bits of dough provided by the Parks Department, city kids can be Huck Finn for a day at the Harlem Meer, in Central Park. and sleepy grass carp aren't so easy to catch, as one angler discovered. "All I've caught is seaweed, some grass, and a piece of dirt," he said, happily.

sixteen-year-old Gore at the 1964 Democratic National Convention, in Atlantic City, and being drawn into a searching conversation by his older sister Nancy about how Al ought to play the question of serving in Vietnam, in light of his future political prospects. At Harvard, Gore wore neckties to class and called his teachers "sir" after everybody else had stopped doing so, made himself a protégé of one of the leading scholars of the American Presidency, Richard Neustadt, and wrote his undergraduate honors thesis (based mainly on interviews with upper-echelon figures in the Washington establishment) on the effect of television on the Presidency. Soon after Gore got to Congress, he began to look for national issues on which he could develop a reputation for stature. He was elected to the Senate, all of whose members have had the thought of being President flit across their minds, at the age of thirty-six. He first ran for President at the age of thirty-nine. The stakes have always been high, and because of the changing politics of the South, and of the nation, the risk has always been high, too. In the last thirty years, words that Albert Gore, Sr., took for granted as the staples of his political rhetoric, like "liberal" and "tax" and "government," have come to have negative connotations. Al Gore has lived a life devoid of incentives to let down his guard.

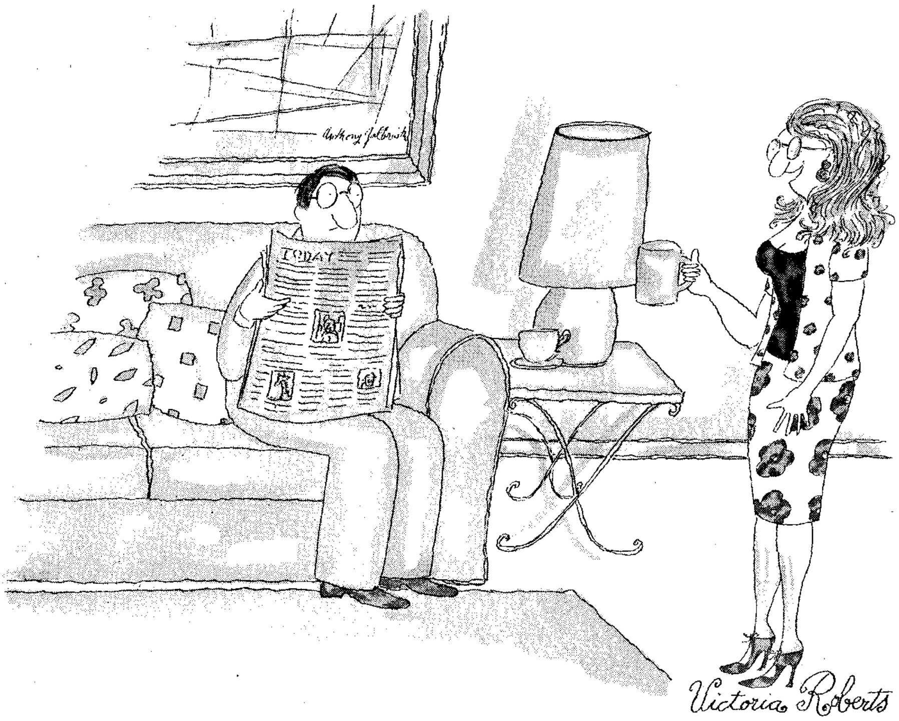
What he has done, perhaps in response, is to develop an intellectual quality that is rare in a politician, a tendency to understand the world in terms of abstract systems. The usual currency of politics is people. You meet with people all day long, people work for you, you stand at the lectern and speak to people, and that leads you to understand the world at large in terms of people, too. Worth is measured in aggregate numbers of people helped. History itself seems to turn on questions of alliances and coalitions and parties and elections. Gore just doesn't think this way. The readout always seems to be saying *Hit escape to go up one level.* So up and up and up he goes—and away and away and away—until he reaches a realm of cosmic understanding of the larger forces against which our petty affairs are played out. Gore is all transcendence and no immanence (and Bush is all immanence and no transcendence). "The world is a system, not a collection of individuals," I heard him say in one of his speeches (not an applause line, you can be sure). Who else would say this in a Presidential campaign, or even think it?

At this empyrean level, where almost none of day-to-day politics is conducted, Gore is the most impressive politician alive. The lack of connection between the drive to moral improvement that seems to be Gore's underlying motivation for being in politics and the careful positioning that has been a prerequisite to election as a Southern Democrat during his adult life disappears. He is free to be a crusader, who wants, quite literally, to rescue humanity (from its own mistakes, through the power of the disciplined mind). When Gore has to come down to the ground level of daily politics, he overcalculates, or he too obviously ingratiates, or he brutally attacks, or he sticks too closely to the script. But that doesn't mean there isn't a real Al Gore behind the opaque exterior. There is. You find him by going up and away.

The earliest clear glimpse of Al Gore's mind is his Harvard undergraduate thesis, "The Impact of Television on the Conduct of the Presidency, 1947-1969." It's good! Gore, though usually a dull speaker, is almost never a dull writer. When he's sitting by himself at a desk, an organized intelligence goes to work. You don't get anecdotes or elegant turns of phrase, but the thoughts are crisp, and they march smartly along, and when a date or a fact is called for he chases it down. Already, in the thesis, a recognizable Gore is present: it is a work of technological determinism, in which systems are more powerful than people, even Presidents of the United States. You can almost feel Gore empathetically entering the situation of the television-challenged Lyndon Johnson and trying to figure out how somebody else equally uncomfortable with the medium might handle it better: by limiting exposure and weighing every word.

In the thesis, Gore makes it clear which medium, print or television, he prefers: in print, "personality factors and visual rhetoric are effectively screened out and the reader is forced to make judgments on the basis of logic and reason." So it shouldn't be surprising that, after college and Vietnam, he chose to take a job at the Nashville *Tennessean.* Old friends of Gore's describe this as the happiest time of his life, and the only time in his adulthood when he usually seemed at

"Has our apologist been alerted?"



"You know, if I wrote all day, and you brought me meals on a tray, I could pretend I was at one of those writers' colonies all summer."

ease and readily made connections with other people (by Gore's, not general human, standards). Journalists know that their field is, counterintuitively, a refuge for shy, self-conscious people. Also, journalism provided an outlet for Gore's love of meticulous, systemic analysis and of moralism: he was an investigative reporter and an editorialist. (For a time while he was at the *Tennessean,* he had gone to Vanderbilt Divinity School.)

At the same time, Gore moved to the place where his family's political base was. The *Tennessean's* editor and publisher, John Seigenthaler, Sr., one of a long line of substitute fathers Gore has acquired during his life, was more than just a newspaperman. He had been an aide to Robert Kennedy and was well connected in the Democratic Party; being his protégé put you into a network that extended into politics.

Bill Kovach remembers getting a call from Albert Gore, Sr., a few years into Al Gore's *Tennessean* period, when Kovach was living in Washington and working for the *Times*. Could he call Al and try to talk him into going to law school? The former Senator said he knew that Al loved his newspaper work, but it would be a shame for him to close off his options, to lose the chance to do something else later. Kovach made the call, and he and the Senator's son had a long talk, with Kovach invoking the names of sainted figures in journalism who had legal training, such as Anthony Lewis, and Gore sounding polite but unenthusiastic. He went, of course, but he still worked for the *Tennessean,* and when the congressman from his home district announced his retirement—the news was conveyed by Seigenthaler, who added, "You know what I think"—he dropped out to run, knowing that in that part of Tennessee once you win a congressional seat it's yours for life. He was elected in 1976, a year of redemption for the Gore family, because while Al was winning Bill Brock was losing the old Gore Senate seat to a Democrat, Jim Sasser.

As a congressman, Gore pursued a two-track strategy. First, he became an obsessively hardworking, risk-avoiding advocate for his constituents. He flew back to middle Tennessee nearly every weekend, and when he was there he would hold town meetings, often as many as five or six a day, to listen to his constituents' complaints. If you asked for a favor, it would be entered in a notebook, which Gore would consult while driving between towns so that he would remember to ask you if that problem with your Social Security check which we discussed a few months back had been taken care of.

The other track involved making his name on issues that were not directly related to his district—unlike his father, who had developed a national reputation as a fierce and partisan advocate on the issues that mattered most to the constituents. Right away, Gore got a seat on the House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee, and was active on the subcommittee on oversight and investigations. In the late seventies, investigating corporate misdeeds had a prestige that is difficult to recapture today. Gore turned the subcommittee into a venue for taking on business bad guys with a brittle, furious moral righteousness. Not yet thirty, he presided over public hearings at which he warned the chairman of Gulf Oil that he was "on thin ice." He went after the contact-lens industry for overpricing, a chemical company for selling a carcinogenic flame retardant used in children's pajamas, and uranium producers for price fixing.

As time went on, Gore shifted his attention, in the great-world compartment of his congressional career, from investigations to arms control. Encountering Leon Fuerth, he signed up for a yearlong, one-on-one tutorial, complete with weekly meetings and a syllabus, and relentlessly mastered what is probably the most arcane topic in government—the topic that may be the most important to the future of humanity but is one of the least important to voters. Becoming an expert on nuclear arms gave Gore a national, and even international, reputation. (Not an easy thing—can you name a junior congressman?) It also established him as the kind of centrist, pro-defense Democrat that the times seemed to demand, especially if you came from the South. And the arms-control debate was conducted in that very Gore realm—*Hit escape to go up one level*—where humans recede and technology and logic come to the fore.

In 1983, when Tennessee's senior senator, Howard Baker, announced his impending retirement from the Senate, Gore, who had been monitoring Baker's intentions since early in his House career, began planning his candidacy at once. He was elected easily, in 1984, and it seemed to be another seat he could hold for life, especially because he continued to visit home constantly and to avoid the kind of stands that had caused his father to lose. As he had in the House, Gore made himself into the kind of member who is more a prominent voice than a passer of bills, engendering in his colleagues more respect than love. In 1991, after he cast one of ten Democratic votes in favor of entering the Gulf War, the Democratic leader, George Mitchell, barely even spoke to him for a time.

In 1987, just two years into his first Senate term, Gore decided to run for President. He was, obviously, not the front-runner, but there was no front-runner that year. (The Democrats wound up nominating Michael Dukakis.) Running was a brassy, but not all that risky, move for Gore. It was the début year for Super Tuesday, the many-state Southern primary designed to put the center of the Party back in control of the nominating process. Even if Gore didn’t win, he would have positioned himself a few notches up in the Party hierarchy, and Super Tuesday gave him a real shot.

But Gore drew a remarkably harsh lesson (to the point of self-flagellation) from the only race he hasn’t won: that he had debased himself in Presidential politics and now he was a man in need of spiritual redemption. He later wrote, “I began to doubt my own political judgment, so I began to ask the pollsters and professional politicians what they thought I ought to talk about. As a result, for much of the campaign I discussed what everybody else discussed, which too often was a familiar list of what the insiders agree are ‘the issues.’ ” (This is an eerily precise description of what Gore has been doing—again—in his second Presidential race.) Now he needed to deepen himself.

Gore asked a group of his friends to set up a series of seminars for him, like the arms-control seminars with Leon Fuerth, only much more ambitious, with big-time thinkers, such as the economists Kenneth Arrow and Brian Arthur, flying to Washington to brief him. *Up one level!* By the end of it, Gore had a new, sweeping view of the world and its prospects. His main interest had noticeably shifted, from arms control to global warming, but the setup was familiar: mankind was in a morally dire situation of its own making, which could be solved through a combination of analytic mastery, spiritual guidance, and the use of technology in healthy ways instead of unhealthy ones.

He decided to write a book. In the summer of 1990, a proposal for a work by Gore about the environment made the rounds of publishers in New York, and John Sterling, the editor-in-chief of Houghton Mifflin, after a long talk with the impassioned Gore, made a deal to publish it. Gore turned in a first draft in July of 1991. Gore mythology has it that seeing his young son hit by an automobile after a baseball game in 1989 helped him decide not to run for President again in 1992. Although his son’s accident was a searing experience and Gore devoted himself completely to the child’s recovery, it’s also the case that at the time he turned in the first draft of the book he still hadn’t made up his mind about 1992. (By his own account he began writing the book in his son’s hospital room.) Sterling and Gore agreed that the book needed substantial revision, and they soon realized that he couldn’t possibly get it done and also run for President. Gore said he needed a little time to think about that. Then, in August, he called Sterling and said he had decided not to run, but he wanted the book to be published in January—before the diversions of Presidential politics. That schedule meant a brutal extra workload for everybody involved, especially Gore himself. But he met the deadline. He worked flat out for months, summoning up all of that furious, hungry, competitive diligence he has. And the book arrived in stores during the third week of January, 1992.

What transaction had just taken place, exactly? Had Gore given up a shot at the Presidency for the sake of the book, because the book was more important to him? Had he insisted on the killer rush because he wanted the book to function as an advertisement for his Vice-Presidential candidacy, or even as a means of late entry into the Presidential race if the other candidates faltered? Whatever was going on, the book that was meant to take him away from the calculations imposed by Presidential politics, that was meant to be renunciatory, brought him back in. Having attempted to free himself of his own “timidity of vision” and become an environmental crusader, Gore wound up in one of the most constrained jobs there is.

Though the book, “Earth in the Balance,” was much made fun of by Republicans, it is an impressive and brave work. Rather than confine itself to matters of government policy, it ranges widely over all manner of historical, psychological, and religious matters. It is melodramatic, apocalyptic, and passionate, the work of a guarded man who has made a conscious decision—forced himself—to bare his soul on the printed page. As he writes, “I have become very impatient with my own tendency to put a finger to the political winds and proceed cautiously.”

The soul that Gore bares in “Earth in the Balance” is a tormented one. The theme of self-criticism is nearly ever present, and Gore makes it clear that, aside from the facts of the case, he was drawn to the environmental crisis and the solving of it as a way of working out a crisis in his own life. As he puts it, “The search for truths about this ungodly crisis and the search for truths about myself have been the same search all along.” He argues that every bad quality in people, singularly or collectively, manifests itself specifically in desecration of the earth. Conversely, the saving of the earth is possible only if we embrace—if he embraces, in particular—a different, better set of qualities. In the moral hierarchy that Gore creates in “Earth in the Balance,” the lowest rung is occupied by cynicism, short-range thinking, and cheap manipulation of images and slogans, all of which he specifically attributes to politics. On the next rung there is logic and reason, but if, in the end, we are going to save the earth this, too, must be put aside in favor of a looser, freer, less controlling spirituality. Female qualities seem to be superior to male ones. In a long passage on dysfunctional families which has an autobiographical air, Gore posits a child who grows up “severely stressed by the demands of the dominant, all-powerful father.” A little later, he suggests that this child “begins controlling his inner experience—smothering spontaneity, masking emotion, diverting creativity into robotic routine.” Environmentalism somehow offers the promise of undoing all that damage and healing all that pain and making one genuine at last.

“Earth in the Balance” is not so much

the work of an intellectual as the work of someone immensely impressed by intellectualism and intellectuals, who occupy the venerated position for him that baseball heroes do for Bush. Gore constantly seeks to demonstrate the breadth of material that he has mastered: the Bible, electrical engineering, mythology, psychology, history. In the footnotes, he mentions having constructed a master calendar correlating the great events of world history with major changes in weather and climate. Can there be anybody in public life who knows more than Gore does, or who so much wants us to see how much he knows? What is also striking about the book is how much it is taken up with a seemingly endless series of metaphors, alternatively high-dramatic, technological, showily erudite, and religio-spiritual. Sandpiles, holography, human skin, machines, the midlife crisis, Kristallnacht, and slavery are all brought in by Gore as points of comparison to environmental phenomena. One of the basic distinctions in literary theory—a subject of intense interest to Gore—is between metaphor and metonymy. Metaphor is implied comparison—the literary equivalent of a cutaway shot in a movie. Metonymy is the expression of a whole by reducing it to a part—the equivalent of a closeup. "My new car is a real thoroughbred!" is metaphoric; "I've got a new set of wheels" is metonymic. Gore communicates by comparing, not reducing—he thinks in metaphors. (And Bush thinks in metonyms.) Even when his intention is to shed all restraint and become passionate and direct, his mind is always taking him away, to something else that seems to him similar to the subject at hand.

It is easy to forget, at this late and weary point in the Clinton Administration, and after so many years of Al Gore-is-stiff jokes and his endless attempts to defuse them (one year he had himself wheeled in to the Gridiron dinner on a handcart), how exciting his nomination as Vice-President was. His book was a big hit, he had an attractive and obviously close family, and he had national stature. He gave Clinton some much-needed ballast. But in hindsight the Vice-Presidency was a perilous role for Gore. It required him to suppress the full-throated passion to which he had

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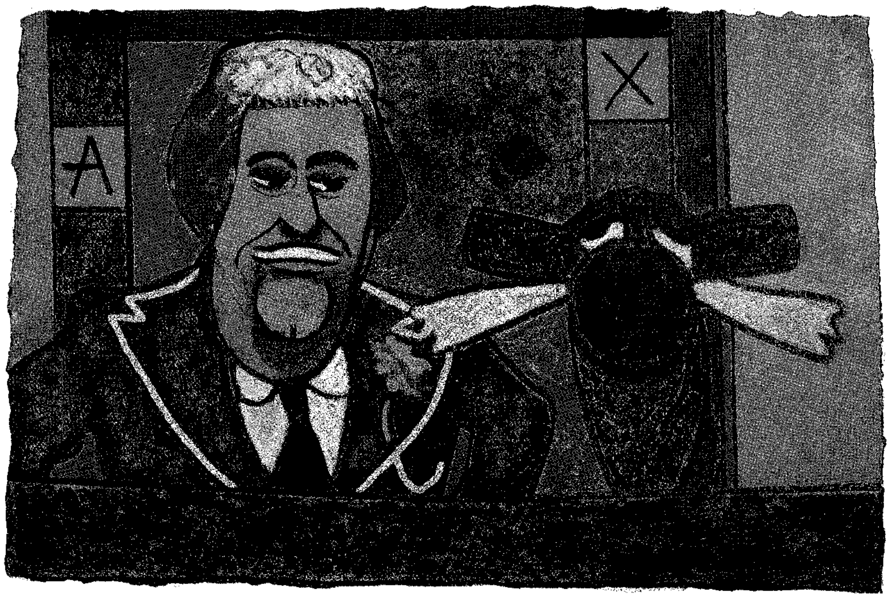
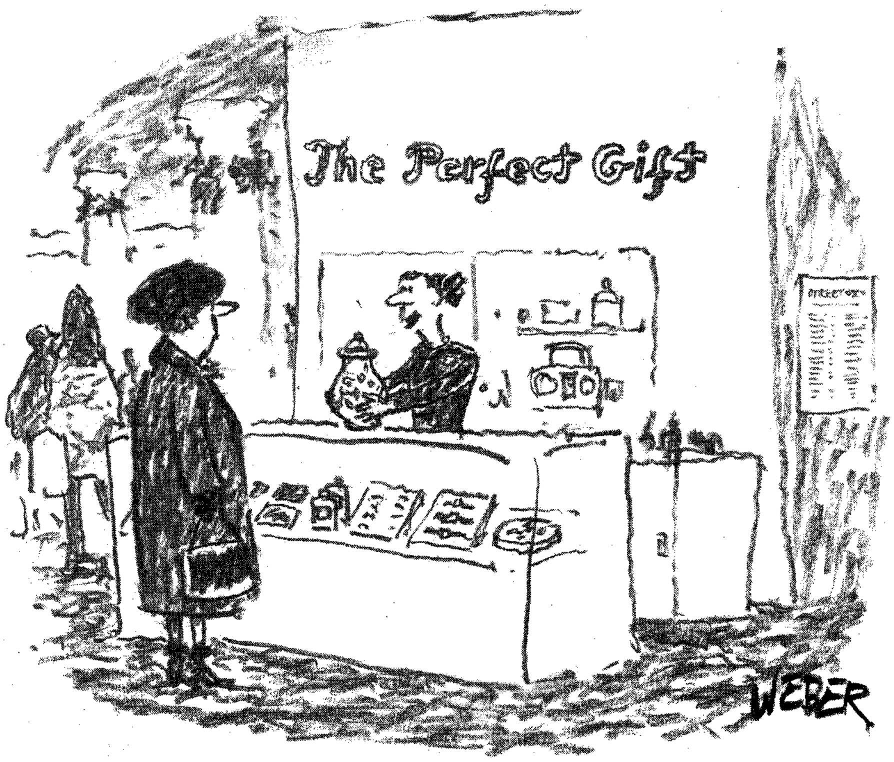


RICHARD MERKIN

The other morning, I roused myself at the sort of hour when a man can be made deaf by the sound of another human being crunching breakfast cereal, in order to watch a children's program called "Captain Kangaroo," which had been recommended to me by a friend (some friend!) as "a really wonderful show." It seems to me that "Captain Kangaroo" is a really terrible show—vapid, pointless, silly, about as interesting an experience for a child as stubbing his toe. I know what you're thinking: What business has an old seafaring man, who has spent most of his last seventy-three years on the water and consequently knows little of the joys and terrors of family life, writing about what's interesting to little kids? I still think it's a terrible show. Kangaroo himself is played by a fellow called Bob Keeshan, whom one would normally describe as "pleasant enough"—and he probably is pleasant enough as Bob Keeshan. As Captain Kangaroo, he seemed half asleep and totally uninterested in what he was doing. Small wonder, too, since what he was doing was padding about onstage in what looked like a doorman's uniform, stopping occasionally to read a bland little children's story, stopping occasionally while a member of the cast sang a bland little children's song, stopping very often to deliver commercials, and, in general, giving every indication of trying to fake his way through a sixty-minute program on five minutes of decidedly skimpy material. May Allah believe me, I don't think children's programs should always be true, beautiful, inspirational, or spiritually enlarging. I'm a great advocate of trash for young and old—good, honest, forthright trash. But this empty, empty, prissy, bumbling, singsongy stuff is something else, and I can't see that it adds up to much of anything. Grown men ought to speak in their own voices when they speak to children, and they ought to pretend to be awake. That doesn't seem a lot to ask.

—Michael J. Arlen
The Air, October 29, 1966



"How about something nice for his ashes?"

pledged himself in "Earth in the Balance" and put him in close proximity to a man who, as a natural at the personal side of politics, might have been custom-designed to heighten his insecurities.

Clinton and Gore have treated each other rather well, though. Clinton gave Gore the things Vice-Presidents always want: a West Wing office, a one-on-one weekly lunch, and supervising authority over a few real issues (as opposed to funeral duty and the chairmanship of ceremonial commissions). Gore, conversely, played two roles, at least in the early years, both of which were quite useful to Clinton. Clinton has trouble taking a firm stand; Gore was the house moralist, the advocate for the option that would represent the unpopular, tough, but right thing to do. He was for imposing an energy tax, intervening early in Bosnia, allowing gays in the military, and balancing the budget. And he took on for the disorganized Clinton the management of big, complex, unglamorous tasks, the kind that involve great draughts of bureaucratic work without much political payoff. He managed the National Performance Review, better known as "Reinventing Government," which involved going through the entire federal government agency by agency and through the budget line by line. He represented the White House in the negotiations over the important but (to the public, anyway) terminally dull telecommunications act, which Congress passed in 1996. He set up three major and several minor bilateral commissions with the No. 2s in foreign governments, which then established subcommittees to discuss the details of government. Nobody has ever taken on such a big workload as Vice-President.

To understand how Gore did at these tasks, it's helpful to think again of the great grinding railyard switch being thrown. When offering his advice, he was preachy, but when he was in charge of something he was ministerial: diligent, careful, responsible, thorough, and politically clunky. The National Performance Review did save a lot of money, mainly by offering corporate-style early-retirement buyouts to civil servants, but Gore was notorious within the Administration for pushing to have an aggressively high savings figure attributed to it. In general, the parts of the review that required systematic understanding and hard work came to fruition and the parts that required political skill did not: the government's computer-buying procedures were modernized, but the Treasury couldn't be induced to turn the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms over to the F.B.I., where it belongs. Gore's Russia commission, similarly, did scads of useful work but wound up embarrassing him politically. Just days after his opposite number, Viktor Chernomyrdin, came to the United States for a chummy joint press conference with Gore in Washington, followed by a trip *à deux* to Silicon Valley, Chernomyrdin was fired by Boris Yeltsin. Gore was great at thorough, and not so great at adept.

The over-all picture of Gore as a government executive which emerges from people who have worked with him is that he always knows the material, that he is efficient and hard-driving, to the point sometimes of being peremptory with staff members who are late with something or haven't done it right, that his intentions are nothing but the best, but that he lacks "touch," or "feel." Clinton is legendary inside the government for improving on the prepared speech or talking points in the delivery; Gore is legendary for sticking rigidly to the script. In meetings, Clinton often guides the discussion to an inference that the staff didn't see in advance; Gore marches through the agenda in precise, orderly fashion, speaking in the technical language of a public-policy graduate seminar. Clinton hates being alone; Gore likes being alone, sitting in his office in front of the computer screen, sipping herbal tea. The mystical part of Clinton's soul finds its expression in actually doing the stuff you do in a government job, like making speeches and lobbying legislators and running meetings. The mystical part of Gore's soul finds its expression in ascending to a plane far above the one where daily politics is practiced. He is never happier than when meeting with the type of person he admires most—not another politician but an intellectual, cultural, or spiritual figure who has thought about the world in a new way, such as Carl Sagan, the astronomer, or Deborah Tannen, the linguist, or the Grateful Dead and the Dalai Lama (both brought to the White House for visits by a proud and delighted Gore), or Stephen Hawking, the theoretical physicist, or Daniel Hillis, the father of parallel computing, or Ian Player, the South African environmentalist who saved the white rhinoceros.

As Gore's White House years went on, he seemed to fall off the wagon he had proclaimed himself to be on by writing "Earth in the Balance." The old, guarded, politically risk-averse version of himself was more often on display. People around him thought that the Democratic rout in 1994 rattled him, and that Clinton's impeachment, coming, as it did, just on the verge of his own Presidential campaign, really rattled him. In both cases, he said in strategy meetings that the President was a kind of national father and that the country now was fatherless—which seemed to people listening to have more to do with the low moment's whisking Gore back to the primal moment of the loss of his own father, on the altar of political courage, in 1970, than with the practicalities of the situation at hand.

In 1997, when an international summit meeting on global warming was held in Kyoto—the issue to which Gore pledged himself utterly in "Earth in the Balance"—he temporized, under a barrage from his political aides, who saw the summit as a loser for him, until the last possible minute. In the end, he went, and he spent the long plane flight forcing his staff through a complete revision of the bland speech that had been written for him. Global warming is the toughest possible issue for Gore. Part of the solution is to convert coal-fired plants, some of the worst of which are in the Midwest, to natural gas, and to reduce auto emissions—and Gore cannot be elected President without carrying the Midwest and retaining the support of the A.F.L.-C.I.O., whose treasurer is the former head of the mine workers' union. In August of 1998, a delegation of heads of environmental groups called on Gore in the White House to urge him to do more on global warming. He lost his temper and shouted, "Name me one senator who'll support me on this!" He told his visitors he had become convinced that we have to have a major catastrophe before the American public will be ready to do anything about global warming.

The Democratic nomination appeared at first to be as safely Gore's as his House and Senate seats had been. When Bill Bradley's challenge looked as if it were unexpectedly going to take off, Gore had an intense, worried reaction, firing a significant portion of the campaign high command he had painstakingly assembled and moving sharply away from the centrist position he had built up over his years in public life. In 1995, Gore held a series of three dinners at the Vice-Presidential mansion to discuss race (Bradley was among the guests). Gore was typically guarded, but one might have surmised that he was rethinking some of the traditional Democratic positions. He had asked prominent thinkers on the topic, including Tamar Jacoby, a writer and editor who is now one of the nation's leading voices of opposition to affirmative action, to organize the dinners; after each one, Gore and Jacoby, along with Martin Peretz, the editor of *The New Republic* (and one of Gore's surrogate fathers), Peretz's wife, Anne, and Stanley Crouch, the fight-picking novelist-critic-musician—Peretz a wholehearted opponent of affirmative action, and Crouch a supporter with reservations—sat around sipping cognac when the other guests had left. Earlier this year, in a debate at the Apollo Theatre, in Harlem, Gore indignantly accused Bradley of harboring inner doubt about the one affirmative-action program that even people who love affirmative action are embarrassed about, a Federal Communications Commission tax break on sales of cable-television systems to (necessarily rich) minorities.

Leaving aside impeachment, which after all had almost no negative impact on Democratic candidates in the last national elections, it would be hard to think of a more ideal set of circumstances under which to run for President than the ones Gore finds himself in this year. The economy is better than it has ever been. We are at peace. The Democratic Party has shed its McGovernite baggage. Gore's opponent has nowhere near his experience or his stamina or his impressive biography or his disciplined mind. But the people around Gore, and evidently the candidate himself, seem to believe that to present him to the voters as he really is—a serious man who at every juncture has pushed himself hard, who cares about doing right, who has developed passion and expertise, who has a sense of the world, who has devoted himself to public life—couldn't possibly work. Instead, the play is to develop a position on each issue that is more popular than George W. Bush's—a Social Security position, a prescription-drug position, a budget-surplus position—and to out-aggress Bush, work longer hours than he can work, go at him hard, rattle him, and force him into mistakes. The Gore people are hiding their guy, in other words, behind a wall of fine-grained political calculation. Most of what Gore says in public is in relation to Bush, rather than about himself. What would we see if he stopped doing that?

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I interviewed Gore on Air Force Two one Saturday afternoon during a flight between a fund-raiser in San Francisco and a fund-raiser in Miami. The plane is set up, back to front, in this way: stewards and kitchen; press; security (more people than you'd expect); staff (fewer people than you'd expect); Vice-President's cabin. The press sits in first-class splendor, hoping, almost always in vain, that Gore will wander back for an informal chat. Everybody warned me that if I asked Gore any question about whatever was the issue of the moment—on that day, whether Janet Reno would appoint a special counsel to investigate his fund-raising activities in 1996—he would answer with bland press-conference rhetoric. So I decided to go as far in the other direction as I possibly could.

Somewhere in the middle of the flight, Chris Lehane, Gore's thin, determined press secretary, came and motioned me up to the front of the plane, and together we went into Gore's cabin. It was small and meticulously neat. There was a desk with a big executive-style chair on each side, and, on the other side of the cabin, a small sofa with a coffee table bolted to the floor in front of it. All the tabletops were perfectly clear.

Gore had us sit together on the sofa, so that we had to pivot to face each other. He was wearing white khakis, a green semi-casual buttoned shirt, and black polished cowboy boots—the uniform of a Sunbelt dad at a Saturday barbecue. Up close, his features, which look thick and blocky to an audience, have an almost porcelain delicacy. He has unusually white teeth and unusually blue eyes. I noticed that his fingernails were bitten to the quick.

Before the three dinners on race that he hosted, he had held a series of three dinners on metaphor, with a leading scholar acting as interlocutor at each one. I asked him why he's so interested in metaphor, mentioning both the dinners and the heavy use of metaphor in "Earth in the Balance."

Gore brightened. "Oh, you've read my book?" he said. "Oh, thank you!" He seemed genuinely pleased, almost to the point of being flustered. "You want some coffee? Water?" I said no, thanks. "Well, thanks for reading my book. I appreciate that. And for you to read it is different from"—readout: *Let's maybe not go there*—"I mean . . . well, anyway, thank you."

He paused for a long time to gather his thoughts, and when he spoke it was in deliberate, print-ready prose, delivered with just the faintest hint of a Southern accent. "The word 'metaphor' is just a highfalutin description of a very common, ubiquitous process by which all of us try to increase our understanding of the world around us," Gore said. "You move from the familiar to the unfamiliar. You use what you know as a tool for trying to better understand what you don't know." He paused again. "At the most basic level, right now, since we've just met, I'm using myself as a metaphor for you."

How so? I asked.

"What I know about human nature is rooted first and foremost in my own life experience, and since I don't know you very well I'm making assumptions about the way you approach life that inevitably begin from the experiences that I have had. And I daresay you're doing the same thing with me. It's not a complicated process, and even to call attention to it gives it more significance than it ought to have. But the point I'm trying to make is that often the word 'metaphor' is simply a shorthand description for a very common, run-of-the-mill intellectual tool that all of us use.

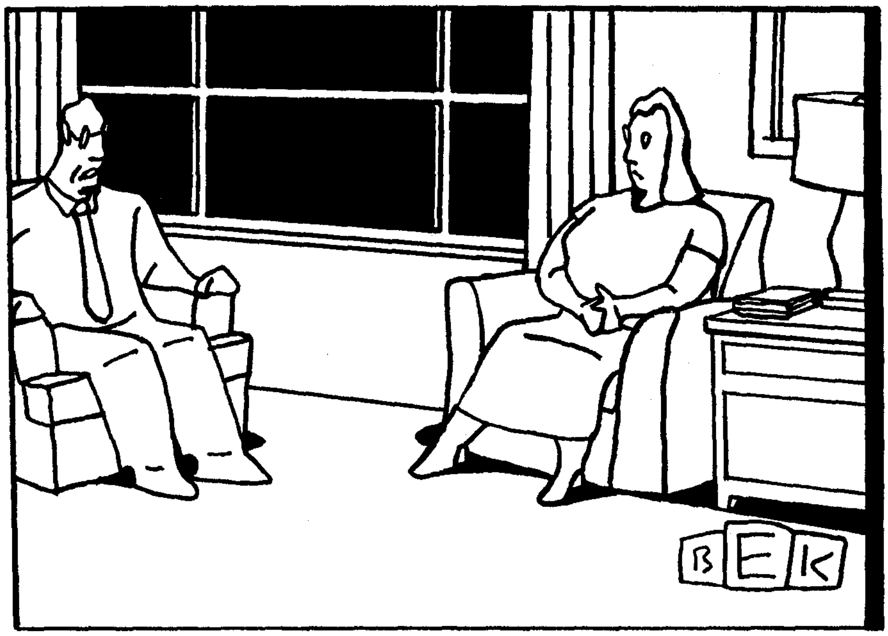
"They're all for staying out of trouble."

"I became interested in more complex metaphors and their explanatory power when I was writing 'Earth in the Balance.' In particular, in my effort to try to understand the origins of our modern world view, and its curious reliance on specialization and ever-narrower slices of the world around us into categories that are then themselves dissected, in an ongoing process of separation, into parts and subparts—a process that sometimes obliterates the connection to the whole and the appreciation for context and the deeper meanings that can't really be found in the atomized parts of the whole—and in exploring the roots of that way of looking at the world, I found a lot of metaphors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that came directly from the scientific revolution into the world of politics and culture and sociology. And many of those metaphors are still with us."

Such as?

"The clockwork universe. The idea that all the world is a machine of moving parts that will eventually be completely understood by means of looking carefully at all the different gears and cogs in the wheels and then . . . " He trailed off; he seemed to be searching for an exact phrase, and as he did this he turned his head in profile, squeezed his eyes shut, and made a pointing gesture with his hand. Then, when the words came, he turned his head back to me and smiled engagingly. "When I compared the absolute number of new scientific insights that came in the first flush of the scientific revolution to the incredible flood of scientific insights that now pour out of every single discipline, every single day, it's astonishing. There's no comparison. And yet the migration of those explanatory metaphors, from the narrow niches of science into the broader public dialogue about how we live our lives and how we understand the human experience and how we can better solve the social problems that become more pressing with each passing decade—that migration is, has been, reduced to the barest trickle."

I started to interrupt to ask another question. "May I make this one final point here?" Gore said. He turned to Chris Lehane. "Give me something to



"*What goes around comes around more annoying.*"

draw with." Lehane didn't have anything, so I tore a piece of paper out of my notebook and gave it to Gore. He put the paper on the coffee table and, leaning over it, made an inscrutable diagram.

Gore showed me the page, which had four pairs of short vertical lines drawn on it, with the space between the lines in each pair varying. "If this"—the first pair—"represented the number of real innovations and brand-new understandings of scientific and mechanical relationships in the world that came after the Cartesian revolution, and all the work done in mathematics and mechanics, this"—the second pair, drawn above it, and spaced a little closer together—"might represent the appearance of analogous explanations in the way society looked at itself. By contrast, this number"—he pointed to the third pair of lines, which were extremely far apart, out at the edges of the piece of paper—"in the current accelerated scientific and technological revolution, wouldn't be represented on a piece of paper in the same scale." Gore then indicated the fourth pair of lines, which were set so close together they were practically touching. "And yet the number of the new insights that make their way into our dialogue with one another about the way our world operates, socially, politically, culturally—well, leave alone culturally, because I think artists have done their own work in communicating nonverbally about some of the insights. But the numbers here would be smaller.

"You see the point?" Gore said. He turned to Lehane again. "Get me the copy of the New York *Times* for today, the full copy. I want the Arts section." Back to me. "And so—well, anyway, I'm sorry. You go ahead."

Gore had strayed quite a bit from the strict definition of a metaphor. Instead, he seemed to mean, by metaphor, a new, unrelated, and probably more creative way of thinking about something drawn from another domain. I asked him whether he was interested in metaphors because he was looking for solutions to problems or because he was trying to figure out how best to communicate with the public.

"Both!"

Lehane returned with the newspaper. Gore pointed to a picture of a dog with the head of a sheep. He gave me a long, deep, direct look and a serious nod. "O.K.?" I asked him what he meant. He paused again in profile.

"Our language hasn't caught up with that artist," he said, turning back to me. "We are breaking apart the traditional boundaries between species. The day after tomorrow, the human genome will be completed in its first rough draft. That is a landmark on the road toward yet another new Promethean technological power, this time to rearrange the way in which life takes its various forms. And this artist seems to me to be saying, at least on one level, 'Here is something you'd better prepare yourself for.' Now, obviously, in the real world that's not going to happen"—meaning a dog with the head of a sheep. "At least I hope it's not going to happen. But something like it is happening already. And the image in that work of art communicates right now, more profoundly than anyone in the world of politics or sociology has been able to communicate, about the kinds of decisions that we have to prepare ourselves to make."

Gore gestured for another piece of paper, and when I gave one to him he bent over the coffee table again and began to draw another diagram. I was starting to wonder whether I ought to direct the conversation more or just keep listening.

The Vice-President worked diligently, like a good student at his desk. This second drawing was made up of a circle with twenty little dots floating inside it, connected by wavy lines. "Now, let me come back to your question." He walked me through Thomas Kuhn's theory of scientific revolutions, apologizing for the overused word "paradigm," and explained that every so often an unusually creative scientist finds a new way to connect the dots of unexplained data.

I started to interrupt. "Hold on," Gore said. He wasn't finished. He leaned forward and lightly touched my arm, to signal me to give him another minute. "That process goes on all the time. What is it that speeds up that process? If you can see a new pattern in one part of the world, it may be a pattern that is widely replicated in other parts of the world. In fact, that is the normal way these things happen. And there is a scientific phenomenon that is called the self-sameness principle. It appears in fractal theory. If you look at a map of the coastline of New Jersey, and then magnify it a hundred times, and then magnify that a thousand times, the basic design of the ins and outs of the coastline will be the same at every level of magnification. And they call that the self-sameness principle. I don't understand it. It's way beyond my depth. But I do believe that there's something about our world that—" He began another long pause. "I'm searching for the right word here—that *manifests* that self-sameness principle in a lot of different ways. And when we find a brand-new understanding of the world that comes out of a powerful new discovery in science, it often allows us to look at social and political matters and find ways to connect the dots that haven't made sense before."

I asked Gore where God fits into all this.

"Give me another piece of paper," he said. He drew a series of small circles, and then a bigger circle over in a corner of the page. "If you"—another pause—"if you are in an animist society, encumbered with a belief system that—now, that's a value judgment, but I will stand by it, I think that it's a confining belief system—if you believe that every object, living or inanimate, which populates your world has its own animating spirit, then intellectually, if you observe some mystery that you can't explain, you are going to be *less than curious* about the nature of that phenomenon, because you will most likely assume that that mystery is easily explainable in terms of the whims in the animating spirit of that object. If, on the other hand, you come to believe in a creator or a deity that is responsible for having set in motion or having created all of the universe, then"—he went back to the paper and drew a series of lines, connecting all the little circles to the bigger one—"you have a new power of curiosity, because you don't assume that there is a whimsical animating spirit that explains what you're observing. You're not afraid of that spirit world. You are God-fearing in the sense that you may have some notion of what duties you owe to the creator responsible for both yourself and the rest of the world, but you can look at the world around you without the same fear and trepidation that an animist has. And that can empower you to look for logical explanations for what's going on in your world."

In 1996, Gore gave a speech to the American Association for the Advancement of Science in which he proposed "distributed intelligence" as the best metaphor for the current historical moment. I asked him how that metaphor applied to government. He

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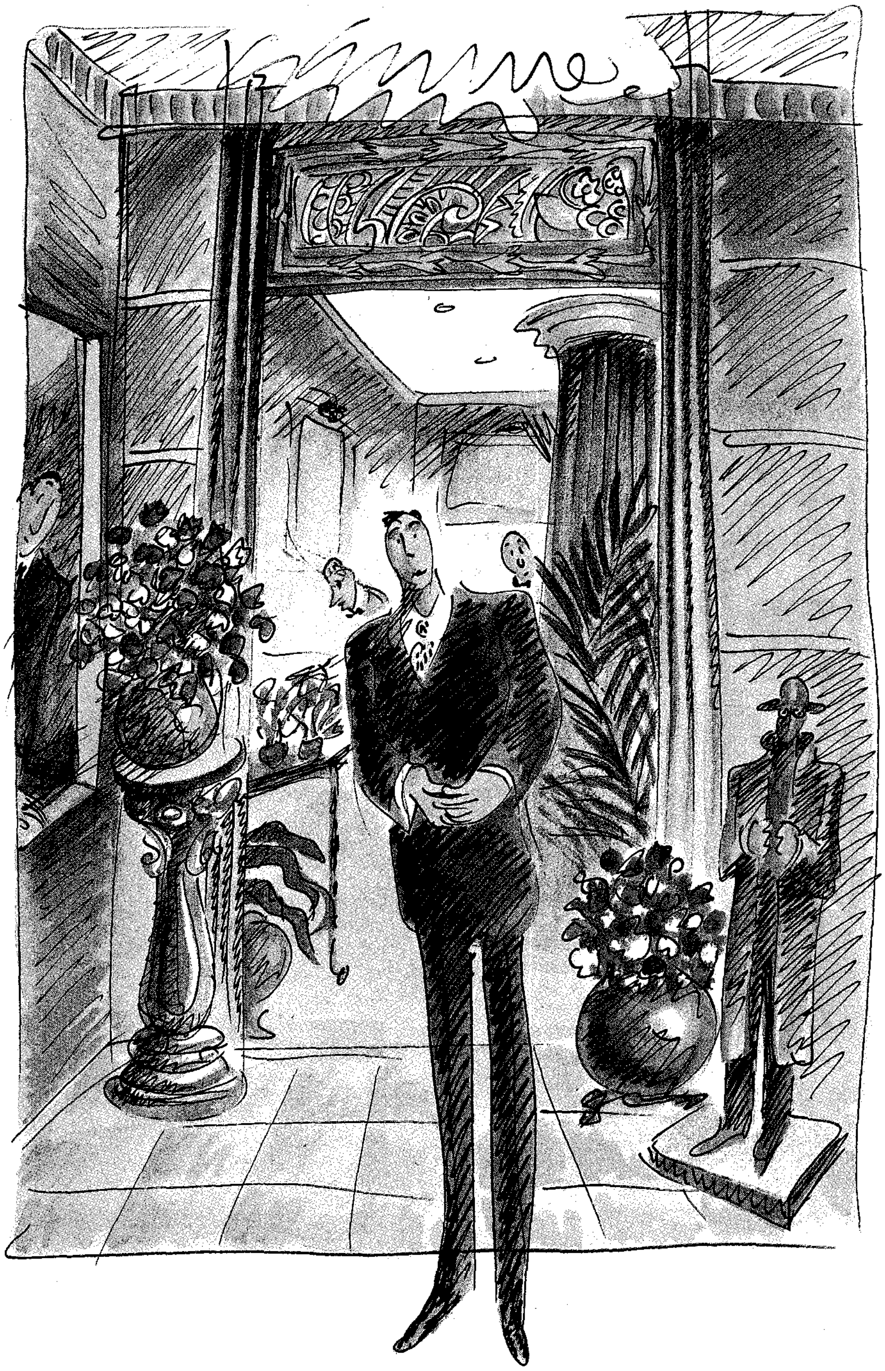
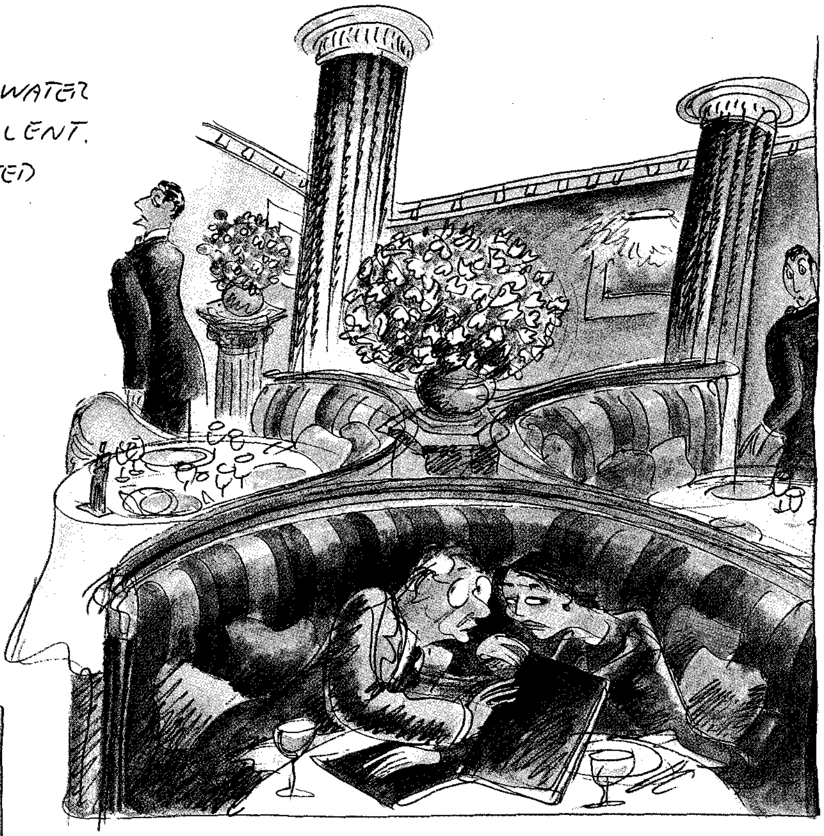
"WE HAVE A CANCELLATION AT THE ALAIN DUCASSE"

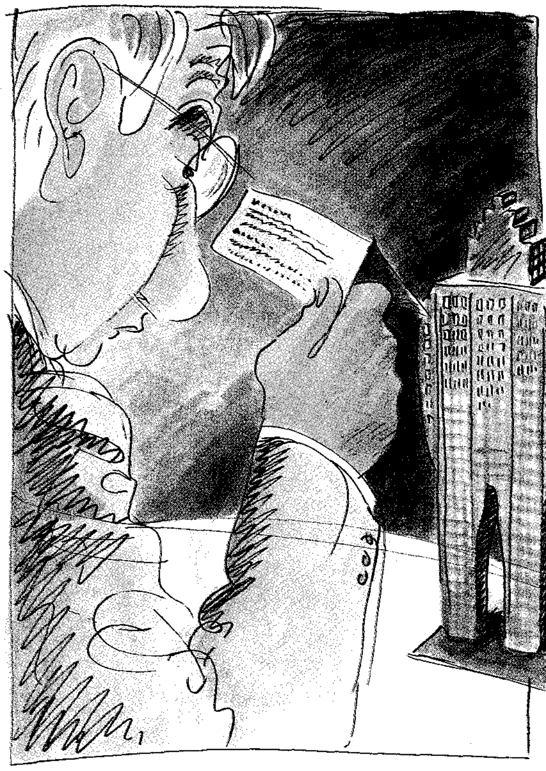
THE AMERICAN RESTAURANT OF FRANCE'S PREMIER CHEF OPENED A MONTH AGO ON CENTRAL PARK SOUTH, AND THE NEWS QUICKLY SPREAD THAT DINNER FOR TWO WOULD COST AROUND FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS. ALL THE SAME, ALAIN DUCASSE AT THE ESSEX HOUSE (AS IT IS INFORMATIVELY NAMED) IS BOOKED SOLID INTO NOVEMBER. THE NEW YORKER WAS PROMISED A TABLE SHOULD THERE BE A CANCELLATION. LAST WEEK, THE CALL CAME. MY FRIEND DOROTHY AND I ARRIVED ON THE DOT OF NOON. THE MAITRE D' SEEMED SURPRISED BY OUR PUNCTUALITY.





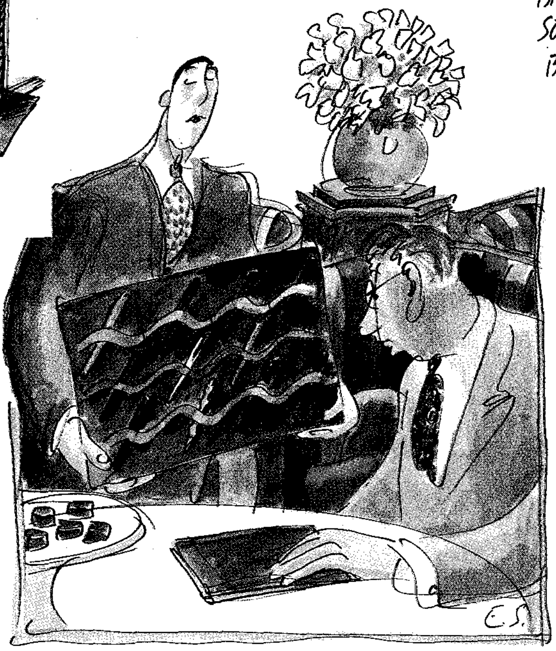
WE ORDERED WINE, AND MINERAL WATER FROM SCOTLAND. BOTH WERE EXCELLENT. DOROTHY, A FORMER MARXIST, NOTED SUSPICIOUSLY THAT HER MENU HAD NO PRICES. I ASSURED HER MINE DID. TO SATISFY HER CURIOSITY, WE EXCHANGED MENUS WHEN WE THOUGHT NO ONE WAS LOOKING.

BETWEEN MY FIRST COURSE, OF SANTA BARBARA SPOTTED PRAWNS IN A CHAUD-FROID CITRUS FONDUE, AND MY SECOND COURSE, OF SPIT-ROASTED BREAST OF CHICKEN WITH A MARMALADE OF CHICKEN LEGS AND A TRUFFLED GRATIN OF MACARONI, I EXAMINED THE TOTEM STANDING ON OUR TABLE. A CARD IDENTIFIED IT AS "CITYMAN," BY FOLON, AND INFORMED US THAT "IT IS NOT THE TRIUMPH OF MAN'S CREATION THAT WE CELEBRATE, BUT THAT OF MANKIND."



BY THE TIME WE ATE OUR EXTRAORDINARY DESSERTS, WE WERE MORE THAN SATED, BUT THE GOODIES KEPT ON COMING: CHOCOLATES, MACAROONS, AND THEN A CART OF CARAMELS AND LOLLIPOPS. THE ONLY WAY TO STOP THIS GENEROSITY WAS TO ASK—NO, *BEG*—FOR THE CHECK, WHICH CAME ACCOMPANIED BY A SELECTION OF FOUNTAIN PENS. I POCKETED A PEN AFTER SIGNING THE BILL, THINKING IT WAS A SOUVENIR. IT WASN'T, BUT IT IS NOW.

—EDWARD SOREL



BAR &
ZIEGLER

"While the cat's away, the mouse will get tanked every night and also grow a beard."

• •

smiled, clearly pleased that I had read the speech. His face was animated and eager, almost shining.

"Here's how it works," he said. "Prior to our Constitution, almost all forms of government relied on a single processor of information, be it a king or a khan or a tsar. The decisions were all concentrated at a single place, from which some of them might have to be delegated, but the responsibility was still placed in a single point." Then he went into a detailed history of the development of parallel computer processing. It was an odd blend of Gore-as-teacher, lecturing me, wanting to confer his understanding, and Gore-as-student, wanting to demonstrate that he had mastered the material. He turned over the last sheet of paper I had given him and drew two circles, one with a single square in the center and arrows pointing in and out of it, the other with a dozen squares scattered in it.

"Now, take this phenomenon"—parallel processing—"as a metaphor and look at systems of government. Here's the King of England in 1776." He pointed to the circle that had a single square in the middle. "Whatever challenge the British Empire faced, the ultimate responsibility for making decisions was at the center. As the world became more complicated, the decisions that had to be made stacked up and the process became unwieldy. When our Constitution was written, the revolutionary insight at its core was that every single individual citizen ought to have the power to make meaningful decisions about the world immediately around him. The system we know as representative democracy would, in this analogy, be comparable to the software that makes it possible to have a simultaneous task order go out to all the citizens with suffrage—remembering that of course only white males were then so recognized—and in the regular election process the young nation endeavored to collect the results of all that information processing and assemble it at the center, in the Capitol building, with representatives bringing with them a rough approximation of what all the voters in their districts were thinking and feeling about the challenges that our nation had to confront." He indicated the second circle, the one containing many squares. "Does that make sense?" He touched my arm lightly again.

I told him I had read his father's books—on hearing this, he beamed again, and thanked me—and had been struck by how much the old man viewed the world through the lens of race and class. Was that a way of thinking that fit the South only in the past, or did it still make sense to him today?

Gore glanced at Chris Lehane. "We can find more time, if you need more time," Gore said. "Not on this flight, but afterward."

He thought for a minute, and then explained that race matters, in a way, less in the South today than in the rest of the country, because the civil-rights movement had put many Southerners, more than people in the rest of the country, through a real transformation. "They emerged from that experience far more enlightened about the true significance of race in our society, and far more able, as a result, to transcend it," he said. "The basic formula is not that complicated. It's a two-step process. You have to first establish absolute and genuine mutual respect for difference. And that respect for difference has to include both an appreciation for the unique suffering that has come about because of the difference, and the unique gifts and contributions that have come about because of the difference. And a basic appreciation for the unique perspective that is based on that difference. Then the second step is a transcendence of that difference to embrace all the elements that we have in common in the human spirit."

My tape ran out—forty-five minutes had passed. I fumbled as I tried to turn it over, and Gore, after watching me for a while, told me how to accomplish the job properly. He had stopped speaking while the tape was not running, and as soon as I had it going again he resumed. "For those who have not been through that searing, transformative personal encounter with the civil-rights revolution a common mistake is to move directly to step two and bypass step one—in other words, to say, 'Can't we just get along?' To say, 'Let's transcend this essentially meaningless, artificial distinction called race.' And it's a noble, if naïve, thought. Worse than that, it can be"—another long pause while he searched for the right word—"disrespectful of the person of another race you're relating to, because it's all too easy for someone in the majority, in a culture shaped by the majority, in a political system largely controlled by the majority, to blithely ignore, or not notice, the profound differences in opportunity and privilege that are pervasive in the experience of someone in the minority in that culture. And if you, as a member of the majority, say, 'Let's just transcend this distinction,' without any apparent appreciation for what the distinction means in the life of the person you're trying to communicate with, all of your seeming good faith will come off as"—another pause—"contextual hostility."

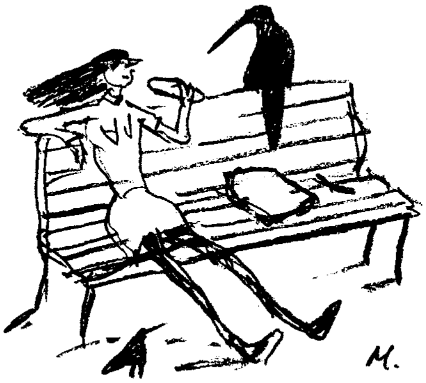
I thought I could see what Gore was doing here. He was explaining, indirectly, subtly, and gently, why he had declined to accept the view of Northern friends of his, like Marty Peretz, that the country should drop affirmative action and pursue absolute color-blindness as an ideal. But he had also chosen—surely not by accident, since nothing Gore does is unconsidered—to answer only the race part of my question, not the class part. I asked him whether he agreed with his father's view that if we could ever get past the race issue we could have a politics of economic class.

"That's the last question," Chris Lehane said.

Gore thought again, and out came another perfectly formed answer. "My father's experience taught him that whenever economic hard times put pressure on those with low incomes and less valuable skills, the result was increased tension between whites and blacks. And therefore his determination to awaken, in whites and blacks alike, the common interest they had in changing policies and politics to empower themselves, and to change the economic royalism, as he would call it, of the Bourbons and their successors, drove him to a view of race that was"—pause—"perhaps too influenced by the enlightenment view." He stopped himself. "Let me rephrase that. Perhaps too influenced by the common liberal view of the time that race was first and foremost—that rac*ism,* excuse me, was first and foremost a logical mistake, which, once corrected, would dissolve and disappear. I don't believe that. At least, I believe that is true, but not the whole truth. It is a logical mistake, a way of thinking profoundly in error. But it is also a manifestation of a deeper vulnerability." An aide came into the cabin and handed Gore a slip of paper with a few words written on it. He glanced at it and turned back to me. "Let me ask you to pause for just five minutes, O.K.?"

I left the cabin and stood outside in the aisle. Gore still hadn't really answered the class part of the question. Here he was, a career government employee who refuses to invest in anything but U.S. Treasury instruments, spending a weekend away from home flying across the country from one fund-raiser to another fund-raiser while figuring out how to handle that week's crisis, which was his possible prosecution for overaggressive fund-raising. And Bush had managed to position himself, pretty successfully, as the populist in the race and Gore as the élitist! It was hard to imagine that the unlikeliness of this being the life of his father's son hadn't occurred to him, but he did not share with me whatever thoughts he had on that subject.

While I was waiting, an image flashed in my mind: Gore in breeches and a powdered wig, composing something at his desk with a quill pen. Perhaps it was a plan for an experiment with new agricultural methods on his land, or correspondence with a like-minded officeholder in another state, or a letter to a packet merchant requesting scientific instruments from France or philosophical texts from England. It also occurred to me that, whatever happens in this election, Gore's reaction will likely be just what it was after his previous Presidential race, in 1988. He'll want to redeem himself from his painful excursion into hard-nosed politics, with its blend of overcautious thought and overaggressive behavior, by launching a moral crusade—either from inside the White House or from private life.



Gore opened the door to the cabin and motioned me back in. When we sat down and he saw that the tape was running again, he picked up exactly where he had left off: "I think it is a mistake in thinking, a profound error. But it's also a manifestation of a deeper vulnerability in human nature, one that we are capable of transcending. But it is a persistent vulnerability." There was another long, searching pause. "My way of understanding this has come in large measure from Reinhold Niebuhr's work, and I'm not qualified to paraphrase it, but if I tried I would say it this way: Each of us has an inherent capacity for both good and evil. And if you prefer nonreligious language you could say that the lingering presence of nature red in tooth and claw that we carry with us from our evolutionary development gives us the capacity to strike out violently when we encounter a fearful difference—when we encounter a difference that inspires fear. Groups protect one another. Survival in the ancient past presumably depended on that ready impulse. But our spiritual nature—or, to describe it again in parallel terms, our evolutionary development—has also given us a much richer heritage with which we can overcome the impulse to evil, or violence, triggered by fear of difference."

By now Chris Lehane was employing nice but insistent the-interview-is-over body language. I was struck, naturally, by the lack of connection between our conversation and the accusatory thrust-and-parry, or rousing catchphrase-making, or after-dinner remarkese, in which people, including Gore, run for President. It was as if the Gore of the past hour were stored in a separate container. "One more thing," I said to Gore. "Everything we've been talking about is to some extent a counterpoint to how one conducts a Presidential campaign. How do you communicate what's in your soul to the American people, through the static of a Presidential campaign?"

Gore stood up and smiled genially, but I thought also ironically. "Are you talking about before this *New Yorker* interview appears? I think this article will completely eliminate that problem." ♦

FICTION

FLOATING BRIDGE

BY ALICE MUNRO

One time, she had left him. The immediate reason was fairly trivial. He had joined a couple of the Young Offenders ("Yo-yos" was what he called them) in gobbling up a gingerbread cake she had just made, and had been intending to serve after a meeting that evening. Unobserved—at least by Neal and the Yo-yos—she had left the house and gone to sit in a three-sided shelter on the main street, where the city bus stopped twice a day. She had never been in there before, and she had a couple of hours to wait. She sat and read everything that had been written on or cut into those wooden walls. Various initials loved each other 4 ever. Laurie G. sucked cock. Dunk Cultis was a fag. So was Mr. Garner (Math).

Eat Shit. H.W. Gange rules. God hates filth. Kevin S. Is Dead meat. Amanda W is beautiful and sweet and I wish they did not put her in jail because I miss her with all my heart. I want to fuck V.P. Ladies have to sit here and read this disgusting dirty things what you write. Fuck them.

Looking at this barrage of human messages—and puzzling in particular over the heartfelt, very neatly written sentence concerning Amanda W—Jinny wondered if people were alone when they wrote such things. And she went on to imagine herself sitting here or in some similar place, waiting for a bus, alone as she would surely be if she went ahead with the plan she was set on now. Would she be compelled to make statements on public walls?

She felt herself connected at present to those people who had had to write certain things down—connected by her feelings of anger and petty outrage (perhaps it was petty?), and by her excitement at what she was doing to Neal, to pay him back. It occurred to her that the life she was carrying herself into might not give her anybody to be effectively angry at, or anybody who owed her anything, who could possibly be rewarded or punished or truly affected by what she might do. She was not, after all, somebody people flocked to. And yet she was choosy, in her own way.

The bus was still not in sight when she got up and walked home. Neal was not there. He was returning the boys to the school, and by the time he got back, somebody had already arrived for the meeting. She told Neal what she'd done, but only when she was well over it and it could be turned into a joke. In fact, it became a joke she told in company—leaving out or just describing in a general way the things she'd read on the walls.

"Would you ever have thought to come after me?" she said to Neal.

"Of course. Given time."

KIM CHARLES FERRILL, "GRANT COUNTY GOTHIC" (1998)/LEE MARKS FINE ART, SHELBYVILLE, IN.

The oncologist had a priestly demeanor and even wore a black turtleneck shirt under a white smock—an outfit that suggested he had just come from some ceremonial mixing and dosing. His skin was young and smooth—it looked like butterscotch. On the dome of his head, there was just a faint black growth of hair, a delicate sprouting, very like the fuzz Jinny was sporting herself, though hers was brownish-gray, like mouse fur. At first, Jinny had wondered if he could possibly be a patient as well as a doctor. Then, whether he had adopted this style to make the patients more comfortable. More likely it was a transplant. Or just the way he liked to wear his hair.

You couldn't ask him. He came from Syria or Jordan—someplace where doctors kept their dignity. His courtesies were frigid.

"Now," he said, "I do not wish to give a wrong impression."

She went out of the air-conditioned building into the stunning glare of a late afternoon, in August, in Ontario. Sometimes the sun burned through, sometimes it stayed behind thin clouds—it was just as hot either way. She saw the car detach itself from its place at the curb and make its way down the street to pick her up. It was a light-blue, shimmery, sickening color. Lighter blue where the rust spots had been painted over. Its stickers said, "I Know I Drive a Wreck But You Should See My House," and "Honor Thy Mother—Earth," and (this was more recent) "Use Pesticide—Kill Weeds, Promote Cancer."

Neal came around to help her.

"She's in the car," he said. There was an eager note in his voice which registered vaguely as a warning or a plea. A buzz around him, a tension, that told Jinny it wasn't time to give him her news, if "news" was what you'd call it. When Neal was around other people, even one person other than Jinny, his behavior changed, becoming more animated, enthusiastic, ingratiating. Jinny was not bothered by that anymore—they had been together for twenty-one years. And she herself changed—as a reaction, she used to think—becoming more reserved and slightly ironic. Some masquerades were necessary, or just too habitual to be dropped. Like Neal's antique appearance—the bandanna headband, the rough gray ponytail, the little gold earring that caught the light like the gold rims around his teeth, and his shaggy outlaw clothes.

While Jinny had been seeing the doctor, Neal had been picking up the girl who was going to help them with their life now. He knew her from the Correctional Institute for Young Offenders, where he was a teacher and she had worked in the kitchen. The Correctional Institute was just outside the town where they lived, about thirty miles away. The girl had quit her kitchen job a few months ago and taken a job looking after a farm household where the mother was sick. Luckily she was now free.

"What happened to the woman?" Jinny had said. "Did she die?"

Neal said, "She went into the hospital."

"Same deal."

Neal had spent nearly all his spare time, in the years Jinny had been with him, organizing and carrying out campaigns. Not just political campaigns (those, too) but efforts to preserve historic buildings and bridges and cemeteries, to keep trees from being cut down both along the town streets and in isolated patches of old forest, to save rivers from poisonous runoff and choice land from developers and the local population from casinos. Letters and petitions were always being written, government departments lobbied, posters distributed, protests organized. The front room of their house had been the scene of rages of indignation (which gave people a lot of satisfaction, Jinny thought) and of confused propositions and arguments, and Neal's nervy buoyancy. Now it was suddenly emptied. The front room would become the sickroom. It made her think of when she first walked into the house, straight from her parents' split-level with the swag curtains, and imagined all those shelves filled with books, wooden shutters on the windows, and those beautiful Middle Eastern rugs she always forgot the name of, on the varnished floor. On the one bare wall, the Canaletto print she had bought for her room at college—Lord Mayor's Day on the Thames. She had actually put that up, though she never noticed it anymore.

They rented a hospital bed—they didn't really need it yet, but it was better to get one while you could, because they were often in short supply. Neal thought of everything. He hung up some heavy curtains that were discards from a friend's family room. Jinny thought them very ugly, but she knew now that there comes a time when ugly and beautiful serve pretty much the same purpose, when anything you look at is just a peg to hang the unruly sensations of your body on.

Jinny was forty-two, and until recently she had looked younger than her age. Neal was sixteen years older than she was. So she had thought that in the natural course of things she would be in the position he was in now, and she had sometimes worried about how she would manage it. Once, when she was holding his hand in bed before they went to sleep, his warm and present hand, she had thought that she would hold or touch this hand, at least once, when he was dead. And no matter how long she had foreseen this, she would not be able to credit it. To think of his not having some knowledge of this moment and of her brought on a kind of emotional vertigo, the sense of a horrid drop.

And yet—an excitement. The unspeakable excitement you feel when a galloping disaster promises to release you from all responsibility for your own life. Then from shame you must compose yourself, and stay very quiet.

"Where are you going?" he had said, when she withdrew her hand.

"No place. Just turning over."

She didn't know if Neal had any such feeling, now that it had turned out to be her. She had asked him if he was used to the idea yet. He shook his head.

She said, "Me neither."

Then she said, "Just don't let the Grief Counsellors in. They could be hanging around already. Wanting to make a preëmptive strike."

"Don't harrow me," he said, in a voice of rare anger.

"Sorry."

"You don't always have to take the lighter view."

"I know," she said. But the fact was that, with so much going on and present events grabbing so much of her attention, she found it hard to take any view at all.

"This is Helen," Neal said. "This is who is going to look after us from now on. She won't stand for any nonsense, either."

"Good for her," said Jinny. She put out her hand, once she was settled in the car. But the girl might not have seen it, low down between the two front seats.

Or she might not have known what to do. Neal had said that she came from an unbelievable situation, an absolutely barbaric family. Things had gone on that you could not imagine going on in this day and age. An isolated farm, a widower—a tyrannical, deranged, incestuous old man—with a mentally deficient daughter and the two girl children. Helen, the older one, who had run away at the age of fourteen after beating up on the old man, had been sheltered by a neighbor, who phoned the police. And then the police had come and got the younger sister and made both children wards of the Children's Aid. The old man and his daughter—that is, the childrens' father and their mother—were both placed in a psychiatric hospital. Foster parents took Helen and her sister, who were mentally and physically normal. They were sent to school and had a miserable time there, having to start first grade in their teens. But they both learned enough to be employable.

When Neal had started the car up, the girl decided to speak.

"You picked a hot enough day to be out in," she said. It was the sort of thing she might have heard people say, to start a conversation. She spoke in a hard, flat tone of antagonism and distrust, but even that, Jinny knew by now, should not be taken personally. It was just the way some people sounded—particularly country people—in this part of the world.

"If you're hot, you can turn the air-conditioner on," Neal said. "We've got the old-fashioned kind—just roll down all the windows."

The turn they made at the next corner was one Jinny had not expected. "We have to go to the hospital," Neal said. "Helen's sister works there, and she's got something Helen wants to pick up. Isn't that right, Helen?"

Helen said, "Yeah. My good shoes."

"Helen's good shoes." Neal looked up at the mirror. "Miss Helen Rosie's good shoes."

"My name's not Helen Rosie," said Helen. It seemed as if it was not the first time she had said this.

"I just call you that because you have such a rosy face," Neal said.

"I have not."

"You do. Doesn't she, Jinny? Jinny agrees with me—you've got a rosy face. Miss Helen Rosie-Face."

The girl did have tender pink skin. Jinny had also noticed her nearly white lashes and eyebrows, her blond baby-wool hair, and her mouth, which had an oddly naked look, not just the normal look of a mouth without lipstick. A fresh-out-of-the-egg look was what she had, as if one layer of skin were still missing, one final growth of coarser, grown-up hair. She must be susceptible to rashes and infections, quick to show scrapes and bruises, to get sores around the mouth and sties between her white lashes, Jinny thought. Yet she didn't look frail. Her shoulders were broad, she was lean but big-boned. She didn't look stupid, either, though she had a head-on expression like a calf's or a deer's. Everything must be right on the surface with her, her attention and the whole of her personality coming straight at you, with an innocent and—to Jinny—a disagreeable power.

They drove up to the main doors of the hospital, then, following Helen's directions, swung around to the back. People in hospital dressing gowns, some trailing their I.V.s, had come outside to smoke.

"Helen's sister works in the laundry," Neal said. "What's her name, Helen? What's your sister's name?"

"Muriel," said Helen. "Stop here. O.K. Here."

They were in a parking lot at the back of a wing of the hospital. There were no doors on the ground floor except a loading door, shut tight. Helen was getting out of the car.

"You know how to find your way in?" Neal said.

"Easy."

The fire escape stopped four or five feet above the ground, but she was able to grab hold of the railing and swing herself up, maybe wedging a foot against a loose brick, in a matter of seconds. Neal was laughing.

"Go get 'em, girl!" he said.

"Isn't there any other way?" said Jinny.

Helen had run up to the third floor and disappeared.

"If there is, she ain't a-gonna use it," Neal said.

"Full of gumption," said Jinny, with an effort.

"Otherwise she'd never have broken out," he said. "She needed all the gumption she could get."

Jinny was wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat. She took it off and began to fan herself.

Neal said, "Sorry. There doesn't seem to be any shade to park in."

"Do I look too startling?" Jinny said. He was used to her asking that.

"You're fine. There's nobody around here anyway."

"The doctor I saw today wasn't the same one I'd seen before. I think this one was more important. The funny thing was he had a scalp that looked about like mine. Maybe he does it to put the patients at ease."

She meant to go on and tell him what the doctor had said, but the fanning took up most of her energy. He watched the building.

"I hope to Christ they didn't haul her up for getting in the wrong way," he said. "She is just not a gal for whom the rules were made."

After several minutes, he let out a whistle.

"Here she comes now. Here-she-comes. Headin' down the homestretch. Will she, will she, will she have enough sense to stop before she jumps? Look before she leaps? Will she, will she—nope. Nope. Unh-*unh*."

Helen had no shoes in her hands. She got into the car and banged the door shut and said, "Stupid idiots. First I get up there and this asshole gets in my way. Where's your tag? You gotta have a tag. I seen you come in off the fire escape, you can't do that. O.K., O.K., I gotta see my sister. You can't see her now, she's not on her break. I know that. That's why I come in off the fire escape. I just need to pick something up. I don't want to talk to her. I'm not goin' to take up her time. I just gotta pick something up. Well, you can't. Well, I can. Well, you can't. And then I start to holler *Muriel, Muriel*. All their machines goin'. It's two hundred degrees in there. I don't know where she is, can she hear me or not. But she comes tearing out and as soon as she sees me—Oh, shit. Oh, shit, she says, I went and forgot. She forgot. I phoned her up last night and reminded her, but there she is. Shit, she forgot. I could've beat her up. Now you get out, he says. Go downstairs and out. Not by the fire escape, because it's illegal. Piss on him."

Neal was laughing and laughing and shaking his head.

Jinny said, "Could we just start driving now and get some air? I don't think fanning is doing a lot of good."

"Fine," said Neal, and started the car and backed and turned around, and once more they were passing the familiar front of the hospital, with the same or different smokers parading by in their dreary hospital clothes with their I.V.s. "Helen will just have to tell us where to go."

He called into the back seat, "Helen."

"What?"

"Which way do we turn now to get to where your sister lives? Where your shoes are."

"We're not goin' to their place, so I'm not telling you. You done me one favor and that's enough." Helen sat as far forward as she could, pushing her head between Neal's seat and Jinny's.

They slowed down, turned into a side street. "That's silly," Neal said. "You're going thirty miles away, and you might not get back here for a while. You might need those shoes." No answer. He tried again. "Or don't you know the way? Don't you know the way from here?"

"I know it, but I'm not telling."

"So we're just going to have to drive around and around till you get ready to tell us."

They were driving through a part of town that Jinny had not seen before. They drove very slowly and made frequent turns, so that hardly any breeze went through the car. A boarded-up factory, discount stores, pawnshops. "Cash, Cash, Cash," said a flashing sign above barred windows. But there were houses, disreputable-looking old duplexes, and the sort of single wooden houses that were put up quickly, during the Second World War. In front of a corner store, some children were sucking on Popsicles.

Helen spoke to Neal. "You're just wasting your gas."

"North of town?" Neal said. "South of town? North, south, east, west, Helen, tell us which is best." On Neal's face there was an expression of conscious, helpless silliness. His whole being was invaded. He was brimming with foolish bliss.

"You're just stubborn," Helen said. "You'll see how stubborn."

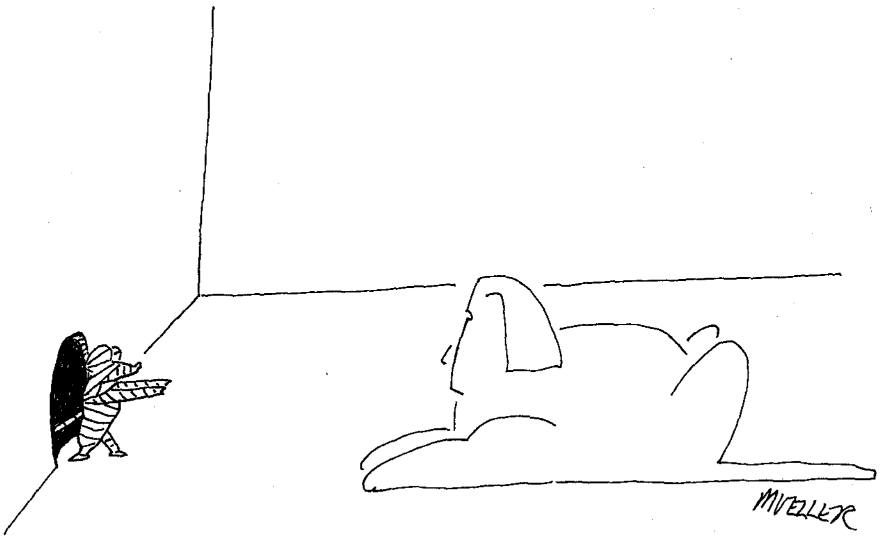
"I am, too. I'm just as stubborn as what you are."

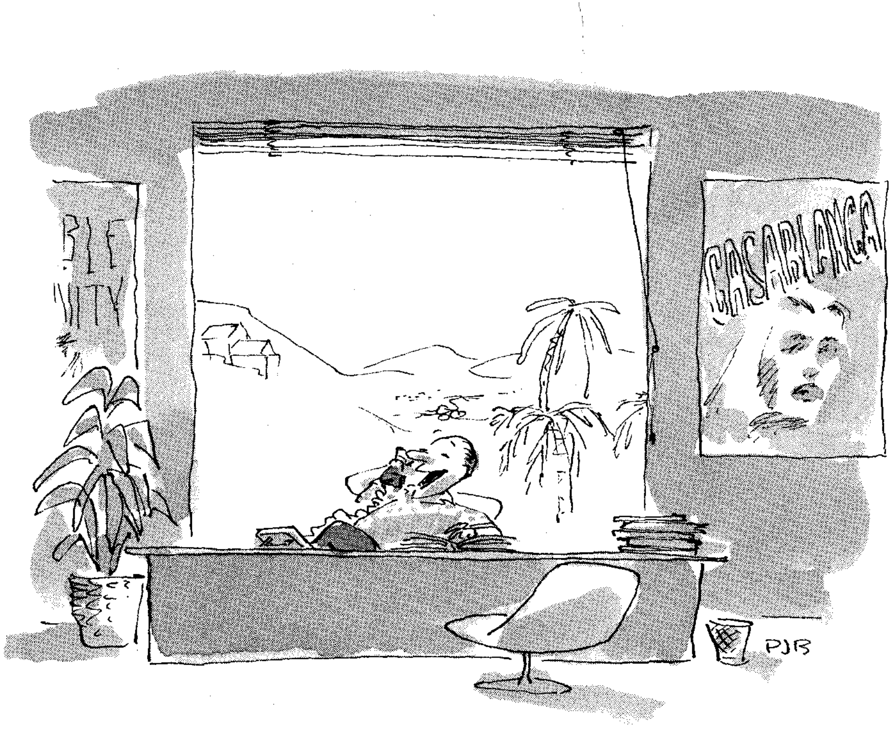
It seemed to Jinny that she could feel the blaze of Helen's cheek, which was so close to hers. And she could certainly hear the girl's breathing, hoarse and thick with excitement and showing some trace of asthma.

The sun had burned through the clouds again. It was still high and brassy in the sky. Neal swung the car onto a street lined with heavy old trees, and somewhat more respectable houses.

"Better here?" he said to Jinny. "More shade for you?" He spoke in a lowered, confidential tone, as if what was going on in the car could be set aside for a moment. It was all nonsense.

"Taking the scenic route," he said,





"Just got the script from the focus group. Fabulous!"

pitching his voice again toward the back seat. "Taking the scenic route today, courtesy of Miss Helen Rosie-Face."

"Maybe we ought to just go on," Jinny said. "Maybe we ought to just go on home."

Helen broke in, almost shouting. "I don't want to stop nobody from getting home."

"Then you can just give me some directions," Neal said. He was trying hard to get his voice under control, to get some ordinary sobriety into it. And to banish the smile, which kept slipping back in place no matter how often he swallowed it.

Half a slow block more, and Helen groaned. "If I got to, I guess I got to," she said.

It was not very far that they had to go. They passed a subdivision, and Neal, speaking again to Jinny, said, "No creek that I can see. No estates either."

Jinny said, "What?"

"Amber Creek Estates. On the sign. They don't care what they say anymore. Nobody even expects them to explain it."

"Turn," said Helen.

"Left or right?"

"At the wrecker's."

They went past a wrecking yard, with the car bodies only partly hidden by a sagging tin fence. Then up a hill, and past the gates to a gravel pit, which was a great cavity in the center of the hill.

"That's them. That's their mailbox up ahead," Helen called out with some importance, and when they got close enough, she read out the name. "Matt and June Bergson. That's them."

A couple of dogs came barking down the short drive. One was large and black and one small and tan-colored, puppylike. They bumbled around at the wheels and Neal sounded the horn. Then another dog—this one more sly and purposeful, with a slick coat and bluish spots—slid out of the long grass.

Helen called to them to shut up, to lie down, to piss off. "You don't need to bother about any of them but Pinto," she said. "Them other two's just cowards."

They stopped in a wide, ill-defined space, where some gravel had been laid down. On one side was a barn or implement shed, tin covered, and over to one side of it, on the edge of a cornfield, an abandoned farmhouse. The house inhabited nowadays was a trailer, nicely fixed up with a deck and an awning, and a flower garden behind what looked like a toy fence. The trailer and its garden looked proper and tidy, while the rest of the property was littered with things that might have a purpose or might just have been left around to rust or rot.

Helen had jumped out and was cuffing the dogs. But they kept on running past her, and jumping and barking at the car, until a man came out of the shed and called to them. The threats and names he called were not intelligible to Jinny, but the dogs quieted down.

Jinny put on her hat. All this time, she had been holding it in her hand.

"They just got to show off," said Helen. Neal had got out, too, and was negotiating with the dogs in a resolute way. The man from the shed came toward them. He wore a purple T-shirt that was wet with sweat, clinging to his chest and stomach. He was fat enough to have breasts, and you could see his navel pushing out like a pregnant woman's.

Neal went to meet him with his hand out. The man slapped his own hand on his work pants, laughed, and shook Neal's. Jinny could not hear what they said. A woman came out of the trailer and opened the toy gate and latched it behind her.

"Muriel went and forgot she was supposed to bring my shoes," Helen called to her. "I phoned her up and everything, but she went and forgot anyway, so Mr. Lockley brought me out to get them."

The woman was fat, too, though not as fat as her husband. She wore a pink muumuu with Aztec suns on it, and her hair was streaked with gold. She moved across the gravel with a composed and hospitable air. Neal turned and introduced himself, then brought her to the car and introduced Jinny.

"Glad to meet you," the woman said. "You're the lady that isn't very well?"

"I'm O.K.," said Jinny.

"Well, now you're here, you better come inside. Come in out of this heat."

The man had come closer. "We got the air-conditioning in there," he said. He was inspecting the car, and his expression was genial but disparaging.

"We just came to pick up the shoes," Jinny said.

"You got to do more than that, now you're here," said the woman, June, laughing as if the idea of their not coming in was a scandalous joke. "You come in and rest yourselves."

"We wouldn't like to disturb your supper," Neal said.

"We had it already," said Matt. "We eat early."

"But there's all kinds of chili left," said June. "You have to come in and help clean up that chili."

Jinny said, "Oh, thank you. But I don't *think* I could eat anything. I don't feel like eating anything when it's this hot."

"Then you better drink something, instead," June said. "We got ginger ale, Coke. We got peach schnapps."

"Beer," Matt said to Neal. "You like a Blue?"

Jinny waved at Neal, asking him to come close to her window. "I can't do it," she said. "Just tell them I can't."

"You know you'll hurt their feelings," he whispered. "They're trying to be nice."

"But I can't."

He bent closer. "You know what it looks like if you don't."

"You go."

"You'd be O.K. once you got inside. The air-conditioning really would do you good."

Jinny just shook her head.

Neal straightened up.

"Jinny thinks she better just stay in the car and rest here in the shade," Neal said. "But I wouldn't mind a Blue, actually."

He turned back to Jinny with a hard smile. He seemed to her desolate and angry. "You sure you'll be O.K.?" he said for the others to hear. "Sure? You don't mind if I go in for a little while?"

"I'll be fine," said Jinny.

He put one hand on Helen's shoulder and one on June's shoulder, walking them companionably toward the trailer. Matt smiled at Jinny curiously, and followed. This time, when he called the dogs to come after him, Jinny could make out their names.

Goober. Sally. Pinto.

The car was parked under a row of willow trees. These trees were big and old, but their leaves were thin and gave a wavering shade. Still, to be alone was a great relief.

Earlier today, driving along the highway from the town where they lived, they had stopped at a roadside stand and bought some early apples. Jinny got one out of the bag at her feet and took a small bite—more or less to see if she could taste and swallow it and hold it in her stomach. It was all right. The apple was firm and tart, but not too tart, and if she took small bites and chewed seriously she could manage it.

She'd seen Neal like this—or something like this—a few times before. It would be over some boy at the school. A mention of the name in an offhand, even belittling way. A mushy look, an apologetic yet somehow defiant bit of giggling. But that was never anybody she had to have around the house, and it could never come to anything. The boy's time would be up, he'd go away.

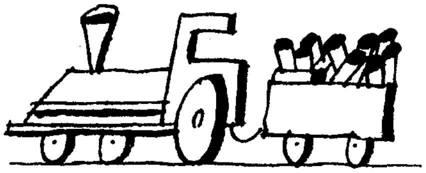
So would this time be up. It shouldn't matter. She had to wonder if it would have mattered less yesterday than it did today.

She got out of the car, leaving the door open so that she could hang on to the inside handle. Anything on the outside was too hot to hang on to for any length of time. She had to see if she was steady. Then she walked a little, in the shade. Some of the willow leaves were already going yellow. Some were already lying on the ground. She looked out from the shade at all the things in the yard.

A dented delivery van with both headlights gone and the name on the side painted out. A baby's stroller that the dogs had chewed the seat out of, a load of firewood dumped but not stacked, a pile of huge tires, a great number of plastic jugs and some oil cans and pieces of old lumber and a couple of orange plastic tarpaulins crumpled up by the wall of the shed. What a lot of things people could find themselves in charge of. As Jinny had been in charge of all those photographs, official letters, minutes of meetings, newspaper clippings, a thousand categories that she had devised and had been putting on disk when she had to go into chemo and everything got taken away. All those things might end up being thrown out. As all this might, if Matt died.

The cornfield was the place she wanted to get to. The corn was higher than her head now, maybe higher than Neal's head—she wanted to get into the shade of it. She made her way across the yard with this one thought in mind. The dogs, thank God, must have been taken inside.

There was no fence. The cornfield just petered out into the yard. She walked straight ahead into it, onto the narrow path between two rows. The leaves flapped in her face and against her arms like streamers of oilcloth. She had to remove her hat, so they would not knock it off. Each stalk had its cob, like a baby in a shroud. There was a strong, almost sickening smell of vegetable growth, of green starch and hot sap.



What she had intended to do, once she got in there, was lie down. Lie down in the shade of these large, coarse leaves and not come out till she heard Neal calling her. Perhaps not even then. But the rows were too close together to permit that, and she was too busy thinking to take the trouble. She was too angry.

It was not about anything that had happened recently. She was remembering how a group of people had been sitting around one evening on the floor of her living room—or meeting room—playing one of those serious psychological games. One of those games that were supposed to make a person more honest and resilient. You had to say just what came into your mind as you looked at each of the others. And a white-haired woman named Addie Norton, a friend of Neal's, had said, "I hate to tell you this, Jinny, but whenever I look at you, all I can think of is—Nice Nelly."

Other people had said kinder things to her. "Flower child" or "Madonna of the Springs." She happened to know that whoever said that meant "Manon of the Springs," but she offered no correction. She was outraged at having to sit there and listen to people's opinions of her.

Everyone was wrong. She was not timid or acquiescent or natural or pure. When you died, of course, these wrong opinions were all that was left.

While this was going through her mind, she had done the easiest thing you can do in a cornfield—got lost. She had stepped over one row and then another, and probably got turned around. She tried going back the way she had come, but it obviously wasn't the right way. There were clouds over the sun again, so she couldn't tell where west was. And she had not checked which direction she was going when she entered the field, anyway, so that would not have helped. She stood still and heard nothing but the corn whispering away, and some distant traffic.

Her heart was pounding just like any heart that had years and years of life ahead of it.

Then a door opened, she heard the dogs barking and Matt yelling, and the door slammed shut. She pushed her way through stalks and leaves, in the direction of that noise. It turned out that she had not gone far at all. She had been stumbling around in one small corner of the field, the whole time.

Matt waved at her and warned off the dogs.

“Don’t be scairt of them, don’t be scairt,” he called. He was going toward the car just as she was, though from another direction. As they got closer to each other, he spoke in a lower, perhaps more intimate, voice.

“You shoulda come and knocked on the door.” He thought that she had gone into the corn to have a pee. “I just told your husband I’d come out and make sure you’re O.K.”

Jinny said, “I’m fine. Thank you.” She got into the car but left the door open. He might be insulted if she closed it. Also, she felt too weak.

“He was sure hungry for that chili.”

Who was he talking about?

Neal.

She was trembling and sweating and there was a hum in her head, as if a wire were strung between her ears.

“I could bring you some out if you’d like it.”

She shook her head, smiling. He lifted up the bottle of beer in his hand—he seemed to be saluting her.

“Drink?”

She shook her head again, still smiling.

“Not even a drink of water? We got good water here.”

“No, thanks.” If she turned her head and looked at his purple navel, she would gag.

“You hear about this fellow going out the door with a jar of horseradish in his hand?” he said in a changed voice. “And his dad says to him, ‘Where you goin’ with that horseradish?’

“ ‘Going to get a horse,’ he says.

“Dad says, ‘You’re not goin’ to catch a horse with no horseradish.’

“Fellow comes back next morning. Nice big horse on a halter. Puts it in the barn.

“Next day Dad sees him goin’ out, bunch of branches in his hand.

“ ‘What’s them branches in your hand?’

“ ‘Them’s pussy willows—’ ”

“What are you telling me this for?” Jinny said, almost shaking. “I don’t want to hear it. It’s too much.”

“What’s the matter now?” Matt said. “All it is is a joke.”

“Would you care to see our gasoline list, or do you know what you want?”

Jinny was shaking her head, squeezing her hand over her mouth.

“Never mind,” he said. “I won’t take no more of your time.”

He turned his back on her, not even bothering to call to the dogs.

“I do not wish to give the wrong impression or get carried away with optimism.” The doctor had spoken in a studious, almost mechanical way. “But it looks as if we have a significant shrinkage. What we hoped for, of course. But frankly, we did not expect it. I do not mean that the battle is over. But we can be to a certain extent optimistic and proceed with the next course of chemo and see how things look then.”

What are you telling me this for? I don’t want to hear it. It’s too much.

Jinny had not said anything like that to the doctor. Why should she? Why should she behave in such an unsatisfactory and ungrateful way, turning his news on its head? Nothing was his fault. But it was true that what he had said made everything harder. It made her have to go back and start this year all over again. It removed a certain low-grade freedom. A dull, protecting membrane that she had not even known was there had been pulled away and left her raw.

Matt’s thinking she had gone into the cornfield to pee had made her realize that she actually wanted to. Jinny got out of the car, stood cautiously, and spread her legs and lifted her wide cotton skirt. She had taken to wearing big skirts and no panties this summer, because her bladder was no longer under perfect control.

A dark stream trickled away from her through the gravel. The sun was down now. Evening was coming on, and there was a clear sky overhead. The clouds were gone.

One of the dogs barked halfheartedly, to say that somebody was coming but somebody they knew. They had not come over to bother her when she got out of the car—they were used to her now. They went running out to meet whoever it was, without any alarm or excitement.

It was a boy, or young man, riding a bicycle. He swerved toward the car and Jinny went round to meet him, a hand on the warm fender to support herself. When he spoke to her, she did not want it to be across her puddle. And maybe to distract him from even looking on the ground for such a thing, she spoke first. She said, "Hello. Are you delivering something?"

He laughed, springing off the bike and dropping it to the ground, all in one motion.

"I live here," he said. "I'm just getting home from work."

She thought that she should explain who she was, tell him how she came to be here and for how long. But all this was too difficult. Hanging on to the car like this, she must look like somebody who had just come out of a wreck.

"Yeah, I live here," he said. "But I work in a restaurant in town. I work at Sammy's."

A waiter. The bright-white shirt and black pants were waiters' clothes. And he had a waiter's air of patience and alertness.

"I'm Jinny Lockley," she said. "Helen. Helen is—"

"O.K., I know," he said. "You're who Helen's going to work for. Where's Helen?"

"In the house."

"Didn't nobody ask you in, then?"

He was about Helen's age, she thought. Seventeen or eighteen. Slim and graceful and cocky, with an ingenuous enthusiasm that would probably not get him as far as he hoped. Jinny had seen a few like that who ended up as Young Offenders. He seemed to understand things, though. He seemed to understand that she was exhausted and in some kind of muddle.

"June in there, too?" he said. "June's my mom."

His hair was colored like June's, gold streaks over dark. He wore it rather long, and parted in the middle, flopping off to either side.

"Matt, too?" he said.

"And my husband. Yes."

"That's a shame."

"Oh, no," she said. "They asked me. I said I'd rather wait out here."

Neal used sometimes to bring home a couple of his Yo-yos, to be supervised doing lawn work or painting or basic carpentry. He thought it was good for them, to be accepted into somebody's home. Jinny had flirted with them occasionally, in a way that she could never be blamed for. Just a gentle tone, a way of making them aware of her soft skirts and her scent of apple soap. That wasn't why Neal had stopped bringing them. He had been told it was out of order.

"So how long have you been waiting?"

"I don't know," Jinny said. "I don't wear a watch."

"Is that right?" he said. "I don't, either. I don't hardly ever meet another person that doesn't wear a watch. Did you never wear one?"

She said, "No. Never."

"Me neither. Never, ever. I just never wanted to. I don't know why. Never, ever wanted to. Like, I always just seem to know what time it is anyway. Within a couple minutes. Five minutes at the most. Sometimes one of the diners asks me, 'Do you know the time,' and I just tell them. They don't even notice I'm not wearing a watch. I go and check as soon as I can, clock in the kitchen. But I never once had to go in there and tell them any different."

"I've been able to do that, too, once in a while," Jinny said. "I guess you do develop a sense, if you never wear a watch."

"Yeah, you really do."

"So what time do you think it is now?"

He laughed. He looked at the sky.

"Getting close to eight. Six, seven minutes to eight? I got an advantage, though. I know when I got off of work, and then I went to get some cigarettes at the 7-Eleven, and then I talked to some guys a couple of minutes, and then I biked home. You don't live in town, do you?"

Jinny said no.

"So, where do you live?"

She told him.

"You getting tired? You want to go home? You want me to go in and tell your husband you want to go home?"

"No. Don't do that," she said.

"O.K. O.K. I won't. June's probably telling their fortunes in there anyway. She can read hands."

"Can she?"

"Sure. She goes in the restaurant a couple of times a week. Tea, too. Tea leaves."

He picked up his bike and wheeled it out of the way of the car. Then he looked in, through the driver's window.

"Keys in the car," he said. "So—you want me to drive you home or what? Your husband can get Matt to drive him and Helen when they get ready. And he can bring me back from your place. Or if it don't look like Matt can, June can. June's my mom, but Matt's not my dad. You don't drive, do you?"

"No," said Jinny. She had not driven for months.

"No. I didn't think so. O.K. then? You want me to? O.K.?"

"This is just a road I know. It'll get you there as soon as the highway."

They had not driven past the subdivision. In fact, they had headed the other way, taking a road that seemed to circle the gravel pit. At least they were going west now, toward the brightest part of the sky. Ricky—that was what he'd told her his name was—had not yet turned the car lights on.

"No danger meeting anybody," he said. "I don't think I ever met a single car on this road, ever. See—not so many people even know this road is here. And if I was to turn the lights on, then the sky would go dark, and everything would go dark, and you wouldn't be able to see where you were. We just give it a little while more, so then when it gets dark, we can see the stars, that's when we turn the lights on."

The sky was like very faintly colored glass—red or yellow or green or blue glass, depending on which part of it you looked at. The bushes and trees would turn black, once the lights were on. There would just be black clumps along the road and the black mass of trees crowding in behind them, instead of, as now, the individual, still identifiable, spruce and cedar and feathery tamarack, and the jewelweed with its flowers like winking bits of fire. It seemed close enough to touch, and they were going slowly. She put her hand out.

Not quite. But close. The road seemed hardly wider than the car.

She thought she saw the gleam of a full ditch ahead. "Is there water down there?" she said.

"Down there?" said Ricky. "Down there and everywhere. There's water to both sides of us and lots of places, water underneath us. Want to see?"

He slowed the car down and stopped. "Look down your side," he said. "Open the door and look down."

When she did that, she saw that

they were on a bridge. A little bridge, no more than ten feet long, of crosswise-laid planks. No railings. And motionless water.

"Bridges all along here," he said. "And where it's not bridges it's culverts. 'Cause it's always flowing back and forth under the road. Or just laying there and not flowing."

"How deep?" she said.

"Not deep. Not this time of year. Not till we get to the big pond—it's deeper. And then, in spring, it's all over the road, you can't drive here, it's deep then. This road goes flat for miles and miles, and it goes from one end to the other. There isn't even any road that cuts across it. This is the only road I know of through the Borneo Swamp."

Jinny said, "Borneo Swamp? There is an island called Borneo. It's halfway round the world."

"I don't know about that. All I ever heard of was just the Borneo Swamp."

There was a strip of dark grass now, growing down the middle of the road.

"Time for the lights," he said. He switched them on, and they were in a tunnel in the sudden night. "Once I turned the lights on like that, and there was this porcupine. It was just sitting there in the middle of the road, sitting up on its hind legs, and looking right at me. Like some little tiny old man. It was scared to death and it couldn't move. I could see its little old teeth chattering."

Jinny thought, This is where he brings his girls.

"So what do I do? I tried beeping the horn, and it still didn't do nothing. I didn't feel like getting out and chasing it. He was scared, but he still was a porcupine and he could let fly. So I just parked there. I had time. When I turned the lights on again, he was gone." Now the branches really did reach the car and brush against the door, but if there were flowers she could not see them.

"I am going to show you something," he said. "I'm going to show you something like I bet you never seen before."

If this had been happening back in her old, normal life, it's possible that she might now have begun to be frightened. If she were back in her old, normal life she would not be here at all.

"You're going to show me a porcupine," she said.

"Nope. Not that."

A few miles farther on, he turned off the lights. "See the stars?" he said. He stopped the car. Everywhere, there was at first a deep silence. Then this silence was filled in, at the edges, by some kind of humming that could have been faraway traffic, and little noises that passed before you properly heard them, that could have been made by birds or bats or night-feeding animals.

"Come in here in the springtime," he said, "you wouldn't hear nothing but the frogs. You'd think you were going deaf with the frogs." He opened the door on his side.

"Now. Get out and walk a ways with me."

She did as she was told. She walked in one of the wheel tracks, he in the other. The sky seemed to be lighter ahead, and there was a different sound—something like mild and rhythmical conversation. The road turned to wood and the trees on either side were gone.

"Walk out on it," he said. "Go on."

He came close and touched her waist, guiding her. Then he took his hand away, left her to walk on these planks, which were like the deck of a boat. Like the deck of a boat, they rose and fell. But it wasn't a movement of waves, it was their footsteps, his and hers, that caused this rising and falling of the boards beneath them. "Now do you know where you are?" he said.

"On a dock?" she said.

"On a bridge. This is a floating bridge."

Now she could make it out—the plank roadway just a few inches above the still water. He drew her over to the side, and they looked down. There were stars riding on the water.

"It's dark all the time," he said proudly. "That's because it's a swamp. It's got the same stuff in it tea has got, and it looks like black tea."

She could see the shoreline, and the reed beds. Water in the reeds, lapping water, was what was making that sound.

"Tannin," she said.

The slight movement of the bridge made her imagine that all the trees and the reed beds were set on saucers of earth and the road was a floating ribbon of earth and underneath it all was water.

It was at this moment that she realized she didn't have her hat. She not only didn't have it on, she hadn't had it with her in the car. She had not been wearing it when she got out of the car to pee and when she began to talk to Ricky. She had not been wearing it when she sat in the car with her head back against the seat and her eyes closed, when Matt was telling his joke. She must have dropped it in the cornfield, and in her panic left it there.

While she had been scared of seeing the mound of Matt's navel with the purple shirt plastered over it, he had been looking at her bleak knob.

"It's too bad the moon isn't up yet," Ricky said. "It's really nice here when the moon is up."

"It's nice now, too."

He slipped his arms around her as if there were no question at all about what he was doing and he could take all the time he wanted to do it. He kissed her mouth. It seemed to her that this was the first time that she had ever participated in a kiss that was an event in itself. The whole story, all by itself. A tender prologue, an efficient pressure, a whole-hearted probing and receiving, a lingering thanks, and a drawing away satisfied.

"Oh," he said. "Oh."

He turned her around, and they walked back the way they had come.

"So was that the first you ever been on a floating bridge?"

She said yes, it was.

He took her hand and swung it as if he would like to toss it.

"And that's the first time I ever kissed a married woman."

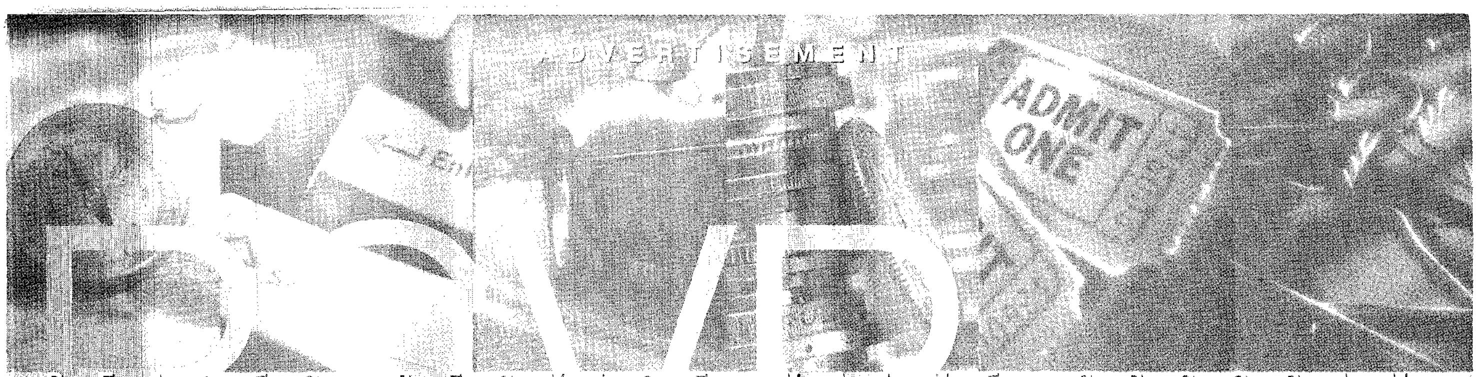
"You'll probably kiss a lot more of them," she said. "Before you're done."

He sighed. "Yeah," he said. "Yeah, I probably will."

Amazed, sobered, by the thought of his future.

She had a sudden thought of Neal, back on dry land. Neal also startled by the thought of the future, giddy and besotted and disbelieving, as he opened his hand to the gaze of the woman with bright streaks in her hair.

Jinny felt a rain of compassion, almost like laughter. A swish of tender hilarity, getting the better of her sores and hollows, for the time given. ♦



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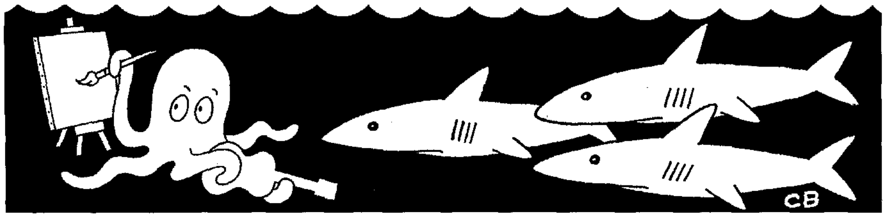


BOOKS

UNDER THE SPELL

Harry Potter explained.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

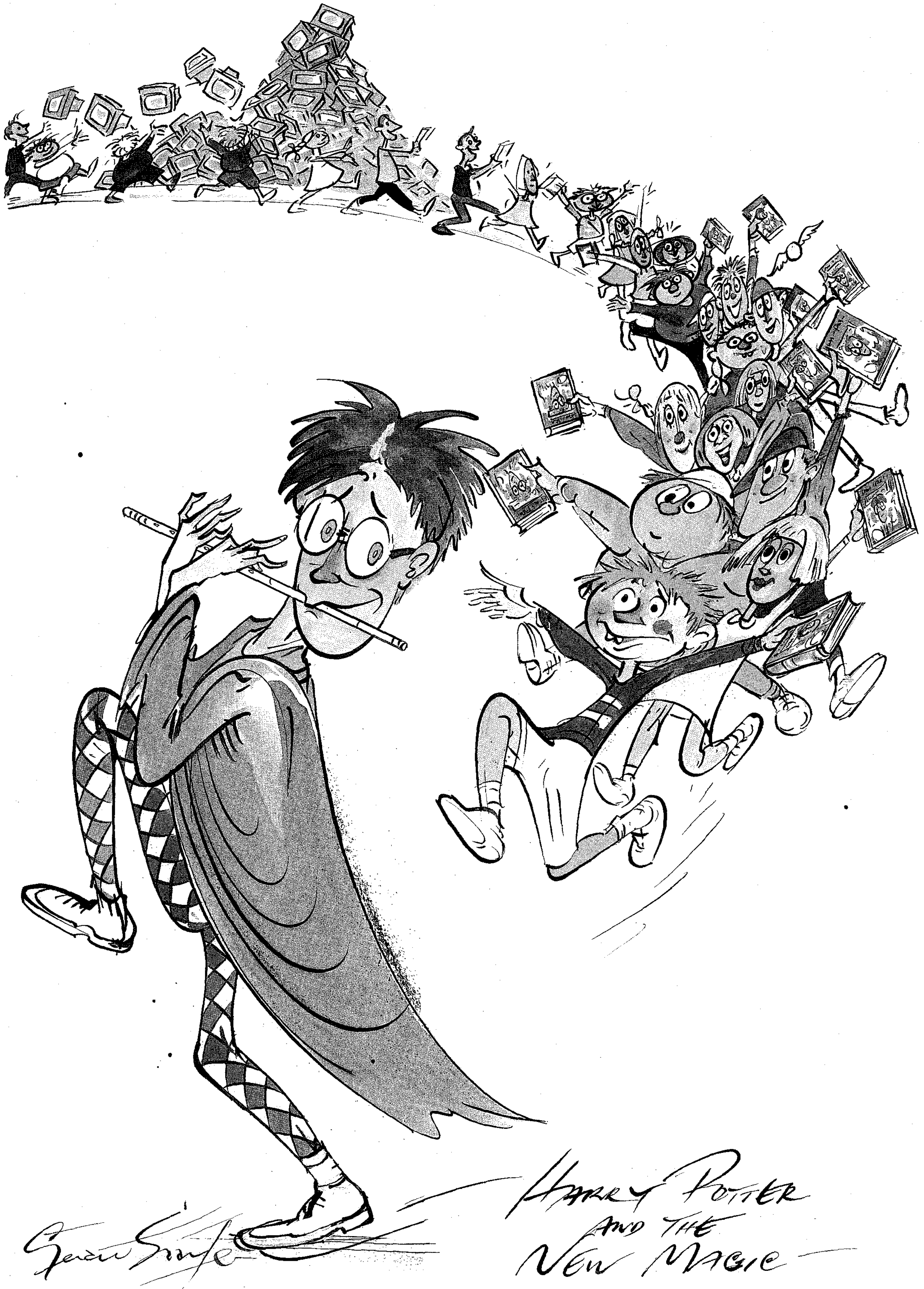
Not since Y2K have we seen a fuss like the one over "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire" (Scholastic; $25.95), the fourth volume in J. K. Rowling's series about a junior wizard. Biggest advance order ever (including Amazon.com's three hundred and fifty thousand), biggest first printing ever (three million eight hundred thousand copies in this country alone), biggest takeover, ever, of the *Times* best-seller list by a single writer, let alone a children's writer. As "The Goblet of Fire" was being printed, the three preceding volumes were all still in the ranking—a circumstance that resulted, last Sunday, in the creation of a separate, children's best-seller list, just what we didn't need. Prior to publication, the book was shrouded in ultra-tight, press-inflaming secrecy. There were no copies for reviewers, or for anyone, before publication day, July 8th. Many stores stayed open late on July 7th—indeed, threw Harry Potter parties—and started ringing up the sales at a minute after midnight. I myself went to Books of Wonder, on West Eighteenth Street, and stood in line for two hours with a lot of excited children and bleary-eyed parents as a Harry Potter look-alike, presumably associated with the store, cruised the sidewalk, distributing press-on lightning-bolt tattoos and fake cheer. Around 1:45 A.M., I made it to the front of the line and was allowed to buy "The Goblet of Fire." After all that, I would love to tell you that the book is a big nothing. In fact, it's wonderful, just like its predecessors.

Part of the secret of Rowling's success is her utter traditionalism. The Potter story is a fairy tale, plus a bildungsroman, plus a murder mystery, plus a cosmic war of good and evil, and there's almost no classic in any of those genres that doesn't reverberate between the lines of Harry's saga. The Arthurian legend, the Superman comics, "Star Wars," "Cinderella," "The Lord of the Rings," the "Chronicles of Narnia," "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes," Genesis, Exodus, the Divine Comedy, "Paradise Lost"—they're all there. The Gothic paraphernalia, too: turreted castles, purloined letters, surprise visitors arriving in the dark of night, backed by forked lightning. If you take a look at Vladimir Propp's 1928 book "Morphology of the Folk Tale," which lists just about every convention ever used in fairy tales, you can check off, one by one, the devices that Rowling has unabashedly picked up. At the beginning of the story, Propp says, the villain harms someone in the hero's family. (The evil wizard Voldemort murdered Harry's good-wizard parents when the boy was a year old, and tried to kill him, too.) The hero is branded. (Voldemort's attack left Harry with a scar in the shape of a lightning bolt on his forehead.) The hero is banished. (Harry is forced to go live with his loathsome aunt and uncle, the Dursleys.) The hero is released. (Harry is finally informed that he is a wizard, and goes off to live at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.) The hero must survive ordeals, seek things, acquire a wise helper, all of which Harry does. The villain must change form and leave bloody trails; Voldemort obliges. According to Propp, a fairy tale is supposed to end with the hero's marriage, but Rowling may break ranks here. She has said that the series will be seven novels long, one for each of Harry's years at Hogwarts. He started there at age eleven, so he will be seventeen when we say goodbye to him. In the line in front of Books of Wonder, there was heated speculation as to who is going to end up as Harry's girl. (I say Ginny Weasley.) I doubt we'll have a wedding, though. Seventeen's a little young.

So Rowling's books are chock-a-block with archetypes, and she doesn't just use them; she glories in them, plays with them, postmodernly. At the Dursleys' house, Harry lives in a cupboard under the stairs, with spiders. Rowling is also a great showoff when it comes to surprise endings, and this, I think, is actually a fault of the books, or of the last two. The dénouements last for pages and pages, as red herrings are eliminated, false identities cleared up, friends unmasked as foes, and vice versa. Not only is this too complicated, the surprises are too surprising. How can Sirius Black, who has been stalking Harry throughout "The Prisoner of Azkaban," turn out to be a good guy—indeed, the boy's godfather? How can Scabbers, whom we have known and loved for three volumes as a dusty, useless little rat, snoozing in the sun, emerge at the end of that book as a deep-dyed villain in disguise? It seems to invalidate all our prior experience of the series. Not to speak of the sheer confusion. Faced with the equally counterintuitive revelations at the end of "The Goblet of Fire," Harry thinks, "It made no sense . . . no sense at all." I agree with him, but apparently we're in a minority.

Rowling has said that she has no trouble at all thinking herself back to age eleven, and the novels show it. There are toilet jokes, booger jokes. There is a ball game, Quidditch—with four kinds of players (all flying on brooms) and three kinds of balls—that sounds as though it were made up by a clever eleven-year-old. And the books

GERALD SCARFE


HARRY POTTER AND THE NEW MAGIC

"Do you mind telling me where you're going with this?"

• •

are filled with children's problems. Do you have bad dreams? Did you find your Christmas presents rather a letdown? Do you hate the new baby in your house? Do you wish you had different parents? Is there something weird that lives under your bed and makes noises at night? If so, Joanne Rowling is thinking about you. Best of all is her treatment of the social nightmares of the schoolyard: cliques, bullying, ostracism, kids who like to remind you that your family doesn't have much money. Such problems are perhaps more pressing in the English boarding school, on which Hogwarts is modelled. (Last year, in the *Times Book Review*, Pico Iyer claimed that Hogwarts was a near-exact replica of Eton, where he did his time.) But the situation clearly rings a bell with Rowling's American readers, too.

More, even, than the Potter books' sensitivity to preteen terrors, it is their wised-upness, their lack of sentimentality, that must appeal to Rowling's audience. However much they have to do with goodness, these are not prissy books. Harry lies to adults again and again. He also hates certain people, and Rowling hates them, too. Uncle Vernon Dursley is not only cruel; he spits when he talks. Harry says the Dursleys wish him dead, and he's right. As for the forces of good, they are often well out of reach. In "The Sorcerer's Stone" there is a heart-stopping scene in which Harry comes upon a mirror, the so-called Mirror of Erised, and sees his dead parents in it. His father waves at him; his mother weeps and smiles. Reading this, you think, Oh, good, thank God—Harry's not really alone, not really an orphan. Yes, he's being hunted down by a remorseless villain—in each of the books, Voldemort pursues him—but his parents' spirits are there to protect him. Then Dumbledore, Hogwarts's wise headmaster, appears and tells Harry that the Mirror of Erised shows us not what is but what we desire. (Read "Erised" backward.) Harry is alone.

The great beauty of the Potter books is their wealth of imagination, their sheer, shining fullness. Rowling has said that the idea for the series came to her on a train trip from Manchester to London in 1990, and that, even before she started writing the first volume, she spent years just working out the details of Harry's world. We reap the harvest: the inventory of magical treats (Ice Mice, Jelly Slugs, Fizzing Whizbees—levitating sherbet balls) in the wizard candy store; the wide range of offerings (Dungbombs, Hiccup Sweets, Nose-Biting Teacups) in the wizard joke store. Hogwarts is a grand, creepy castle, a thousand years old, with more dungeons and secret passages than you can shake a stick at. There are a hundred and forty-two staircases, some of which go to different places on different days of the week. There are suits of armor that sing carols at Christmastime, and get the words wrong. There are poltergeists—Peeves, for example, who busies himself jamming gum into keyholes. We also get ghosts, notably Nearly Headless Nick, whose executioner didn't quite finish the job, so that Nick's head hangs by an "inch or so of ghostly skin and muscle"—it keeps flopping over his ruff—thus, to his grief, excluding him from participation in the Headless Hunt, which is confined to the thoroughly decapitated.

The Hogwarts staff is a display case all its own: Mad-Eye Moody, the professor of Defense Against the Dark Arts, who, apart from his ocular problems, has a chunk of his nose missing and a wooden leg ending in a clawed foot; Rubeus Hagrid, the gentle-giant gamekeeper, with his pet, Norbert, a baby dragon, whom he feeds a bucket of brandy mixed with chicken blood every half hour. Norbert isn't the only monster. There are also centaurs, basilisks, and hippogriffs, together with hinkypunks, boggarts, and, my favorites, the grindylows. Harry encounters his first grindylow in a tank in a professor's office: "A sickly green creature with sharp little horns had its face pressed against the glass, . . . flexing its long spindly fingers." (Later, the grindylow shakes its fist at him.) To deal with such encounters, and other life events, the students must learn many spells: "Expelliarmus," to get rid of something; "Waddiwasi," to extract gum from keyholes; "Peskipiksi Pesternomi," to make pixies leave you alone. Hogwarts is a whole, bursting world.

Most of Rowling's characters are

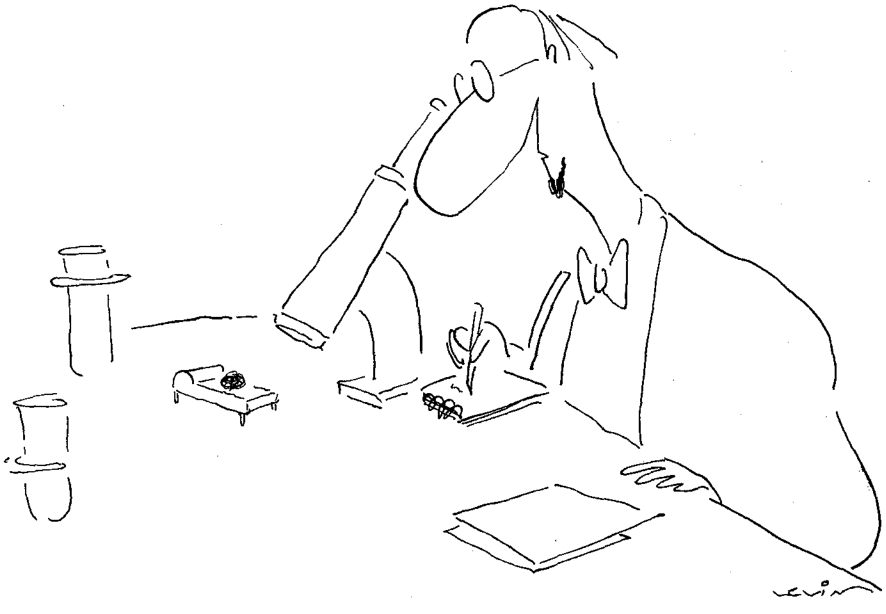
types, and excellent as such, but some rise to a richness beyond the reach of British central casting. Voldemort, for example. When he failed to kill the infant Harry, Voldemort was disempowered, and it is in this weakened state that we first encounter him in "The Goblet of Fire." But he isn't just weak. He is—grotesquely, disgustingly, terrifyingly—a *baby:* "hairless and scaly-looking, a dark, raw, reddish black. Its arms and legs were thin and feeble, and its face—no child alive ever had a face like that—flat and snakelike, with gleaming red eyes." Soon—as soon as he is immersed in a potion made from Harry's blood and someone else's hacked-off hand and various other ingredients—he becomes his adult self again, which is not so handsome either, but that first sight of him, that little red thing, swaddled in blankets, is a triumph of horror fiction.

It's horror with a difference, though. Rowling's favorite writer, she has told interviewers, is Jane Austen. She also loves Dickens. And it is in their bailiwick—English morals-and-manners realism, the world of Pip and Miss Bates, of money and position and trying to keep your head up if you have neither—that she scores her greatest victories. A nice example is the scene, in "The Sorcerer's Stone," where Harry and Ron meet for the first time, on the train that is taking them, as entering students, to Hogwarts. Each is handicapped. Harry, though he is famous throughout the wizard world (because, as an infant, he repelled Voldemort's attack), and though he has a pile of gold left to him by his parents, is without family and utterly ignorant of wizardry. Ron comes from a long line of wizards, and he has family galore, but that is his problem: five older brothers, no position. He is always dressed in hand-me-downs; his mother always forgets what kind of sandwich he likes; he has no spending money. Together, in the train compartment, the two boys comfort and help each other. Harry shares the wizard candies he buys from the vender (he can afford them); Ron explains the wizard trading cards that come with the candies (he understands them). Harry gives Ron prestige; Ron gives Harry a sense of belonging. All this is done very Englishly, very subtly, in small gestures, but in the end each boy, because of the other, arrives at Hogwarts slightly better armed against the harshness of the world.

The subject of the Harry Potter series is power, an important matter for children, since they have so little of it. How does one acquire power? How can it be used well, and ill? Does ultimate power lie with the good? (In other words, is there a God?) If so, why is there so much cruelty around? These are questions that Milton, among others, addressed before Rowling, and she is not ashamed to follow in their wake. Voldemort is an avatar of Milton's Lucifer; Dumbledore of Milton's God, who so mysteriously permits evil in the world.

Each of the novels approaches the problem from a different angle. The first, "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone," is heroic. We meet our champion; he is a child; we watch him grow into competence and faith. The second volume, "Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets," is quite different: secular, topical, political. Sexism is not a major problem at Hogwarts. The school is coed. Several of the Quidditch champions are girls. Harry's friend Hermione, the know-it-all girl, the hand-up-in-class girl—Rowling has said she based the character on herself as a child—is not forced to go through the Katharine Hepburn treatment (take off her glasses, unpin her hair) before she becomes likable. But racism *is* a problem at Hogwarts. Yes, the student body includes Cho Chang and Parvati Patil and Dean Thomas, who has dreadlocks. (Rowling forgot about a few other groups, though. I would not have minded if the evil Professor Snape had not had a hook nose, greasy black hair, and sallow skin—standard features of the rapacious Jew—or if the chief villain of "The Sorcerer's Stone" had not worn a purple turban, been prone to faint and weep, and had the name Quirrell, which is rather close to "queer.") But the wizard world is in the grip of an overarching race war, a campaign to rid wizardry of those with Muggle, or non-wizard, blood. This ethnic-cleansing campaign, led by Voldemort, is the subject of "The Chamber of Secrets." It fails, but only for the time being. We will hear about it again.

The strangest volume is the third, "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban," the psychological installment, featuring a pack of demons—operating at Voldemort's bidding—who are the most frightening monsters in the series so far. These are the Dementors: huge, cloaked, faceless creatures, with rotting hands, who, if they get you, clamp their jaws on your mouth and suck out of you every thought of happiness. The Dementors represent depression. Actually, if I'm not mistaken, they represent a specific, British theory of depression—John Bowlby's theory that loss of a parent in early childhood is a major risk



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factor for that disorder. At age one, Harry lost both his parents. (I don't know much about Rowling's childhood, but she has told interviewers that she suffered a period of depression as an adult, and had to get professional help.) In any case, the Dementors are after Harry, and he escapes them only with the help of a teacher named Lupin. To Lupin alone can he fully confide his fears, and Lupin's teachings are the closest thing, in the Potter series, to overt psychological counselling of child readers. At the end of "The Prisoner of Azkaban," this nice man turns out to be a werewolf (Rowling's antisentimentality again), but he's a good werewolf.

The new book, "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire," is the central pillar of the projected series of seven and is thus a transitional volume. It introduces many new subjects, notably sex. (Harry is fourteen now, and mightily taken with Cho Chang.) Also, the politics become more ambitious. Rowling now asks her readers to consider the cynicism of government officials, the injustice of the law courts, the vagaries of international relations, the mendacity of the press, even the psychology of slavery. ("They're *happy*," Ron's brother says of the house-elves. Hermione does not agree.) This is a great, toppling heap of subjects, and Rowling takes seven hundred and thirty-four pages to deal with them. (Has there ever before been a children's story seven hundred and thirty-four pages long? What confidence!) Where the prior volumes moved like lightning, here the pace is slower, the energy more dispersed. At the same time, the tone becomes more grim. Voldemort has been restored to power. Things will now become harder for Harry, and for all the wizard world. Dumbledore says so.

There is much for Rowling to resolve in the remaining volumes, above all the question about power—is it reconcilable with goodness?—that she poses in the first four books. Already in "The Sorcerer's Stone," Quirrell says, "There is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it." As Harry has grown, he has become more powerful and ambitious and, at the same time, more virtuous. In "The Goblet of Fire," as in all the books, there is a big contest, which Harry longs to win. The contest is in three parts, and in each part, lest we miss the point, Rowling shows Harry handicapping himself, hurting his chances of victory, out of concern for others. He wins, but how will he do, thus compromised by altruism, in future contests? Remember: Voldemort is back.

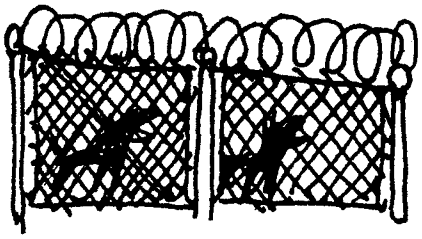
Even more interesting, however, is a strange matter—something about the *kinship* of good and evil—that Rowling has been hinting at since the beginning of the series. Harry and Voldemort have a lot in common. Both have Muggle blood; both are orphans. Their wands contain feathers from the same phoenix. When they meet in armed combat in "The Goblet of Fire," their wands, as they touch, produce a single stream of light, which binds them together. There is some connection between these two. (Shades of "Star Wars.") I don't know what Rowling has in mind here. Maybe it's the Miltonic idea of evil as merely good perverted. Or maybe not.

But that is the main virtue of these books, their philosophical seriousness. Rowling is a good psychotherapist, and she teaches excellent morals. (Those parents who have objected to the Potter series on the ground that it promotes unchristian values should give it another read.) She also spins a good yarn. Undoubtedly, it is Voldemort and the Dementors and the grindylows that have gotten these books translated into forty languages and won them sales, *before* "The Goblet of Fire," of more than thirty million copies. But her great glory, and the thing that may place her in the pantheon, is that she asks her preteen readers to face the hardest questions of life, and does not shy away from the possibility that the answers may be sad: that loss may be permanent, evil ever-present, good exhaustible. In an odd, quiet moment in "The Goblet of Fire," Harry stands alone in Hogwarts's Owlery, gazing out into the twilight. He sees his friend Hagrid digging in the earth. Is Hagrid burying something? Or looking for something? Harry doesn't know, and for once he doesn't investigate. He seems tired. He just stays there, watching Hagrid, until he can see him no more, whereupon the owls in the Owlery awaken and swoosh past him, "into the night." In this volume, some darkness has fallen. With the light—the next three books—new griefs will surely come. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Living to Tell, *by Antonya Nelson (Scribners; $24).* At the start of Nelson's droll yet wistful examination of inertia, which is set in the suburbs of Wichita, Professor Mabie's three grown children have drifted back to the nest: Mona because of a suicide attempt; Emily, with children in tow, after leaving her drug-dealer ex (nicknamed The Excrescence); and Winston after serving five years for killing his grandmother in a drunk-driving accident. Tobacco and booze are commonplaces in the Mabies' middle-class household, and yet one of this novel's pleasures is its refusal to conform to fashionable attitudes toward dysfunction. ("Imperfection is interesting," Mona's therapist dryly remarks, and it could serve as the author's motto.) These tentative adults *enjoy* their slapdash, intrigue-filled life together, but, soon enough, unforeseen circumstances are propelling them forward once more.

Madumo: A Man Bewitched, *by Adam Ashforth (Chicago; $20).* For many South Africans, the power of witchcraft is just another condition of life, like the economy, or politics. On a recent trip to Soweto, Ashforth, a white Australian who lived there during the transition, found his old friend Madumo in a bad state—disowned by his family, virtually destitute, and convinced that he had been bewitched. Madumo's attitude toward sorcery is complex. He decides to subject himself to the rigorous ministrations of a traditional healer, though he understands that the witchcraft boom in post-apartheid Soweto has been prompted by the pressures and jealousies of a newly competitive society. The more Ashforth learns, the more difficulty he has in precisely quantifying the various forces—economic, magical, psychological—that make up Madumo's curse.



Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages, *by Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine (Oxford; $27.50).* This superb study of endangered languages opens with a quote from William Cuppy: "Most of us feel that we could never become extinct. The Dodo felt that way too." According to Nettle and Romaine, at least half of the world's approximately six thousand languages will disappear from the earth in the next century. The authors equate language extinction with species extinction, and identify certain areas of the world that are especially rich in "biolinguistic diversity." The tapestry of supporting detail is every bit as compelling as the central thesis—from an examination of how indigenous languages function as museums of local culture (there is a wonderful account of fish-hook vocabulary in a language spoken by Palauan fisherman) to a history of the way in which dominant languages like English, Mandarin, and Spanish have vanquished more vulnerable tongues.

Zoetrope: All-Story, *edited by Adrienne Brodeur and Samantha Schnee (Harcourt; $14).* The pieces in this strong, if uneven, collection first appeared in the literary journal of the same name, which was founded three years ago by Francis Ford Coppola to explore the relationship between short fiction and film. The more eye-catching pieces, written by literary celebrities, are nonfiction (Salman Rushdie lamenting the vagaries of the television industry, David Mamet ridiculing Hollywood's star system), but the book's greatest offerings are found in its fiction. Adam Haslett's "Notes to My Biographer" (about a doomed manic-depressive who visits his world-weary gay son) and Lucia Nevai's "Step Men" (whose narrator makes a pilgrimage with her three ex-husbands) are accomplished, startling stories, reminding us that, notwithstanding the Technicolor spectacle of movies, life's truths are often starkest when they're caught on the page.

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BOOKS

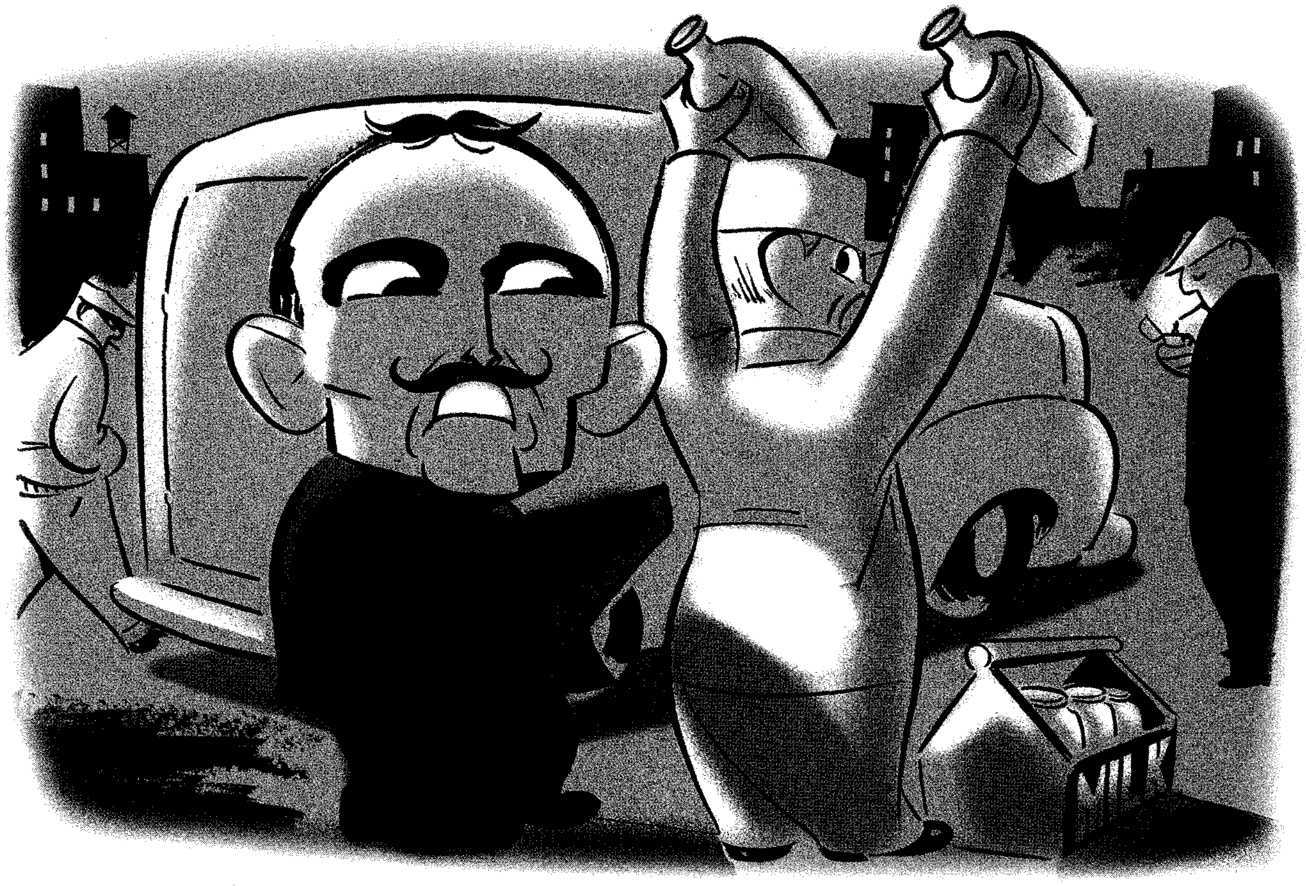
THE SINS OF THE FATHER

Does it matter that the Mayor's dad was a crook?

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

On April 2, 1934, Harold Giuliani robbed a milkman. He was, by all indications, not a particularly adept crook. Before the holdup, Giuliani and his accomplice were spotted casing the building in which it was committed, and afterward the accomplice managed to get away with the cash—a hundred and twenty-eight dollars and eighty-two cents—while the Mayor's father got sixteen months in Sing Sing.

The psychological profile prepared for the judge in the case before sentencing described a young man whose main impulse was to feel sorry for himself. "He is not anxious about his predicament on account of a feeling of guilt," Benjamin Apfelberg, a psychiatrist with the city's Department of Hospitals, wrote. "He rationalizes the motives of his offense in a self-pitying way in order to obtain sympathy." Apfelberg went on to suggest that the prospects for Harold Giuliani's "social rehabilitation" were "favorable," but that "the prognosis in regard to improvement in personality" was "rather dubious."



Harold Giuliani robbed a milkman in 1934 and was sentenced to Sing Sing for sixteen months.

ERIC PALMA

At the time it was committed, Giuliani's crime attracted no notice, and had it not been for Wayne Barrett, a senior editor at the *Village Voice*, it probably never would have. When he was arraigned, Giuliani *père* gave the alias Joseph Starrett, a subterfuge that failed to fool the court but made the record of his conviction that much more difficult to find for the many people who might have liked to. Even the F.B.I., which performed at least two background checks on Giuliani when he was appointed to positions in the Department of Justice, seems to have missed it.

Two new biographies of the Mayor came out this month—Barrett's "Rudy! An Investigative Biography" (Basic; $26) and Andrew Kirtzman's "Rudy Giuliani: Emperor of the City" (Morrow; $25). Both arrived far ahead of schedule and yet hopelessly too late. The two volumes were supposed to have appeared in the final, frenzied weeks of Giuliani's Senate race, when interest in the candidate's life would, presumably, have been at its peak. Instead, thanks to a series of all too interesting developments in that life, there is no campaign, and no frenzy. Basic Books had planned a first printing of a hundred thousand copies of "Rudy!"—a figure that has since dropped to forty-five thousand.

That the books were conceived at a more triumphal moment is clear right away from their titles and also from their emphases. Both are about Giuliani's boundless ambition, drive, and force of will, although Kirtzman wants to take a balanced view of the Mayor and Barrett, thankfully, does not. Certainly, no account of Giuliani could overlook his monumental egotism, yet this isn't, amid the wreckage, what stands out anymore as the most remarkable thing about him. So successfully has Giuliani laid waste to his career that even the latest revelation about his father, as serious as it is, takes on an almost pathetic redundancy—the anvil that drops on the coyote after the steamroller has already flattened him.

Much of what the two biographies report is, at least in its broad outlines, familiar. The Mayor's love of the limelight, his exaggerated sense of his own accomplishments, his correspondingly low opinion of anyone who questions these accomplishments, and his willingness to crush those who raise such questions are all, more or less, part of the public record. As for his philanderings, which his wife described two months ago on national TV, the moment to be shocked about those, too, has obviously passed.

Neither Barrett nor Kirtzman got any help from Giuliani. He refused to talk to the writers, and he tried to prevent many who are close to him from talking to them as well. Barrett reports that things eventually got so bad that the Mayor's press secretary asked him to put requests for routine press releases in writing, only to ignore them. One nervous—or, at least, histrionic—source insisted on meeting him on a state turnpike, in the dead of night, to hand over documents.

That the Mayor's fall occurred while Barrett was wrapping up his work may have been awkward for the biographer, but it was revealing of his subject. Giuliani was aware of the book, knew Barrett's reputation for dogged reporting, and must have realized that any documented infidelities would not play well in a campaign year. Yet that was precisely the moment when his conduct became most indiscreet. The Mayor took to visiting his "very good friend," Judith Nathan, at her condo in Southampton, with six or more policemen in tow. He began hanging out with her at a cigar bar owned by his New Age chum Elliot Cuker, where the two used to retire to a private room with a leather couch. Nathan accompanied the Mayor on his rounds this past New Year's Eve, and in March he took her to the annual revue put on by City Hall reporters at the New York Hilton. With Barrett on his case, this was either the height of arrogance or a cry for help.

During his mayoralty, Giuliani often invoked his father. He liked to say that he had adapted his principles for running the city from the formula his father used for running the family: it is better to be respected than loved. When, in April, the Mayor was diagnosed with prostate cancer, the same disease that killed Harold Giuliani, in 1981, he said, "I miss my father every day of my life. And he's a very, very important reason for why I am standing here as the mayor of New York City."

It is unclear whether the Mayor himself was aware of his father's robbery conviction. He was not born until ten years after the crime, but he grew up among many people who must have known about it, including his mother, née Helen D'Avanzo, who had been dating Harold for several years at the time of the robbery; the five D'Avanzo brothers, most of whom took a dim view of their sister's romance; and his maternal grandmother, who lived with the Giulianis for much of Rudy's childhood. It is possible that the family shielded young Rudy from the secret, but it is also possible that the crime-fighting Mayor decided that talking about his father's own criminal record would only confuse things. In any event, he is not talking about it now. "The fact is, I am not going to discuss that," Giuliani said recently when confronted by reporters. "It has no relevance to me and to what I do as mayor of New York City or to my life."

According to Barrett, the robbery was not an isolated mistake. After returning home from Sing Sing, Harold Giuliani had trouble finding steady work, and ended up behind the counter of a Brooklyn bar run by his brother-in-law Leo D'Avanzo. Barrett makes a convincing case that the real profit center at the bar was a loan-sharking and gambling operation, and he claims that one of Harold's duties was to play enforcer. Harold Giuliani seems never to have harbored the kind of professional ambitions exhibited by his brother-in-law, whose partner was a made man, or, for that matter, by his brother-in-law's son, Lewis, who operated a stolen-car ring, hijacked a truckful of mercury, and dealt in forged documents before being killed by F.B.I. agents.

When the Mayor was a teen-ager, his father tried to break away from his in-laws but seems never to have made it on his own. He took a job as a groundskeeper at a Long Island high school but lost it because of absenteeism and drifted back to his post at the bar. His travails included ulcers, heart trouble, and some sort of nervous breakdown. All in all, he comes across in Barrett's account as an irascible and pathetic figure, who, one presumes, would have been at least as hard for a son to respect as to love. Rather than risk having to serve in the Second World War, Harold Giuliani appears to have tipped off the local draft board to his own arrest record.

As the Mayor has pointed out, the revelations about his father do not compromise his own history as a crime-fighter. But they can't help making his stance as public moralist seem vexed in yet a new way. Whether he was railing against squeegee men or offensive art or sex shops or just wayward pedestrians, Giuliani has distinguished himself by his pitiless sense of right and wrong. In his zeal, he often seemed to confuse empathy with weakness, and weakness with vice. Just because his father possessed many of the flaws the Mayor frequently condemned does not mean that Giuliani's displays of admiration for him were insincere or hypocritical. It just means that he lives in a morally complicated world, like the rest of us. ♦

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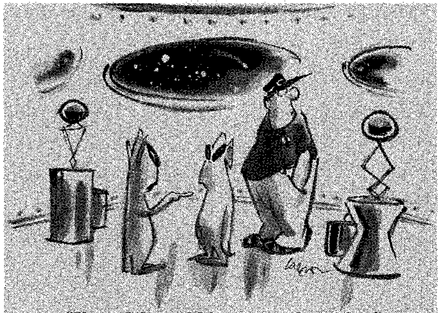

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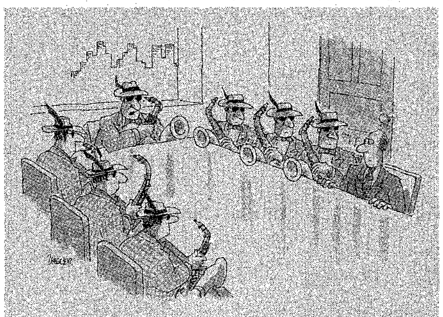

"Damn it, Hopkins, didn't you get yesterday's memo?"

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MUSICAL EVENTS

WHITE NOISE

Looking back on a century of beeps and squawks.

BY ALEX ROSS

Around 1900, composers felt that music was in a prison, and that it had to be liberated. Ferruccio Busoni wrote, "Music was born free; and to win freedom is its destiny." A few years later, Arnold Schoenberg proclaimed the "emancipation of the dissonance." What was this prison, and who was running it? A century later, it's hard to understand how the situation ever seemed so oppressive. Mahler, Strauss, Rimsky-Korsakov, Fauré, and Debussy, among others, had discovered opulent new stylistic worlds, some of which are still being explored today. But the next generation felt the need to start over, with fresh harmonies, fresh forms, fresh instruments. Busoni got wind of an American invention called the Dynamophone—a machine that could "transform an electric current into a fixed and mathematically exact number of vibrations." He predicted that electronic instruments would lead composers into a sonic utopia. "Music may be restored to its primitive, natural essence," he wrote. "Let it follow the line of the rainbow and vie with the clouds in breaking sunbeams."

Busoni was right, although his prophecy came true in a way that might have baffled him. The spread of technology in music—recording, radio broadcasting, amplification, analog sound generation, and digital sound generation—contributed to the marginalization of classical music and the spawning of dozens of new genres. Composers have certainly worked hard to master electronic media, and their achievement has recently been the focus of attention at Lincoln Center's Festival 2000: human performers have shared the stage with a prickly company of machines. Yet electronic composers increasingly appear to be supporting actors in a pop-music story. Busoni's rainbow music shimmers down from the loudspeakers of dance clubs.

With the Dynamophone lost to history, the earliest surviving electronic instrument is the theremin, which appeared in 1920. Last week, at the Society for Ethical Culture, Lydia Kavina demonstrated its sci-fi charms, generating spacey vocalise by moving her hands around two antennas. The precision of her gestures was more impressive than anything on the program, which ranged from disposable novelty pieces to the dismal expressionist nostalgia of Olga Neuwirth's "Bählamms Fest." The festival also spotlighted the ondes martenot—essentially a theremin with a keyboard. Olivier Messiaen used it in many of his major works, among them "Trois Petites Liturgies," which the Asko, Schönberg, and Vox Vocal Ensembles played and sang magnificently, under the direction of Reinbert de Leeuw. In the hands of Valérie Hartmann-Claverie, the ondes martenot gave out a songful, animal cry.

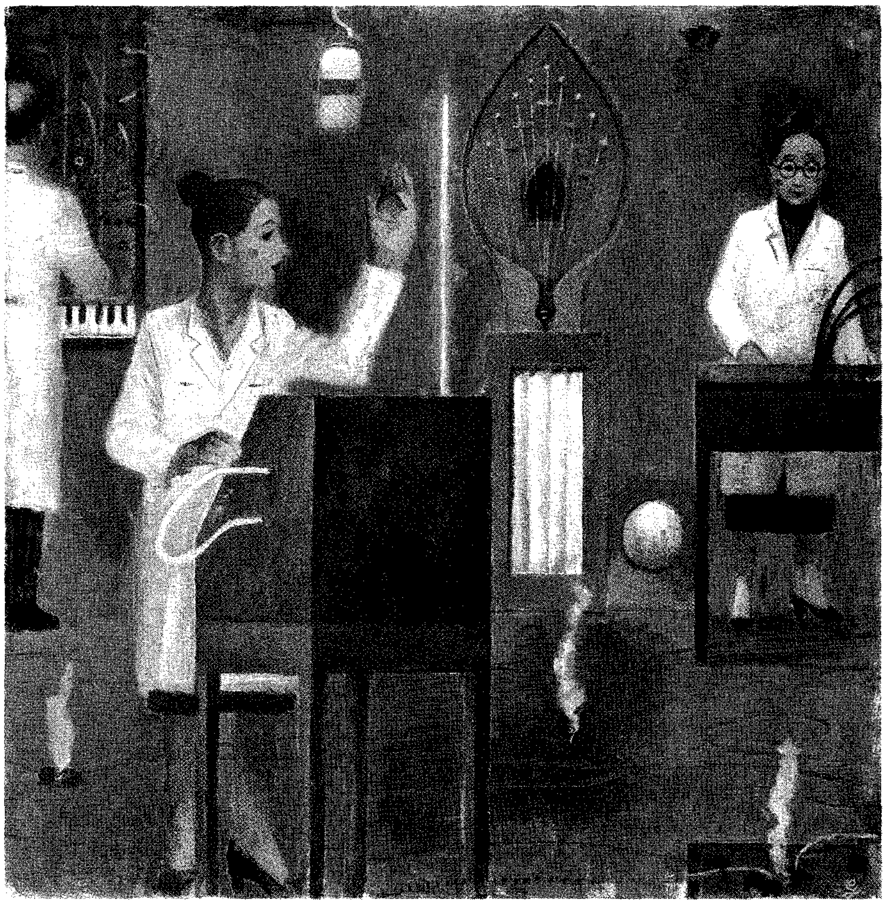
The revolution began in earnest with the early experimental works of John Cage. His "Imaginary Landscape No. 5," a collage of phonograph records from 1952, appeared on a festival program called "The Turntable as an Ensemble Instrument." Although Cage originally used only jazz records, the d.j.s who played the work live—DJ A. Vee, DJ Frankie, Kuttin' Kandi, and Christian Marclay—moved from jazz to electronica and on to hip-hop. The composer's personality emerged in periodic, abrupt silences, which cut off any hint of the accumulation of a groove. Later, d.j.s were given free rein to practice their art. The X-ecutioners closed the concert with a thirty-minute composition, which in its intricate tangle of heavy beats sounded like a hip-hop "Rite of Spring."

After the war, tape machines and synthesizers joined the armory. The festival surveyed this period with a program entitled "Masterpieces of Twentieth-Century Multichannel Tape Music," and before the concert, one could visit interactive installations that have come out of the Columbia University Computer Music Center. The "masterpieces" ranged from pioneering compositions of the postwar avant-garde—Varèse's "Poème

Électronique," Stockhausen's "Gesang der Jünglinge," and Xenakis's "Bohor"—to newish pieces by Jean-Baptiste Barrière, Dennis Smalley, and Paul Lansky. At the installations, one could hear one's voice processed by the computer or draw curves for sounds on the screen.

Considered in chronological order, the pieces progressed from the individual to the anonymous. Varèse's "Poème," from 1958, replicates in electronic form the distinctive, declamatory gestures of his instrumental works. Lansky's "Night Traffic," from 1990, transforms traffic noise into sweetly chattering chords that could have been composed by almost anyone, including Tangerine Dream. The machines, it seems, have had a mind of their own, steadily pulling the music in the direction of ambient atmosphere. In the earliest, most primitive tape pieces of the fifties, you can hear intimations of the thick, hazy textures of contemporary dance music. A truly representative survey would have included Brian Eno, Kraftwerk, Grandmaster Flash, and the German band Can (two of whose members studied with Stockhausen). The festival might logically have culminated with a night out at Twilo, with Sasha and John Digweed in the d.j. booth.

"But where are the compositions?" Messiaen once asked when he contemplated the vogue for electronic music. Composers work with musical building blocks, repeating and developing them over long, flexible durations. In electronic media, the blocks multiply ad infinitum, so that notes become data and instruments become programming patterns. There are, however, signs of resistance to the never-ending flood of impersonal technologies: certain devices seem to acquire human dimensions at the moment they become obsolete. Robert Moog's analog synthesizers are cool again; retro-hip bands such as Supergrass are reviving the theremin. And the turntable turns out to be an instrument with unexpected powers of expression. As on a violin, the right hand makes a sound and the left hand makes it tremble.



Sonic utopia: the Moog synthesizer, the theremin, and the ondes martenot.

GERARD DUBOIS

Other events in the Lincoln Center Festival sent mixed signals about the fate of the composer in the plugged-in realm. There was, first, Louis Andriessen's new opera, "Writing to Vermeer," which might be more accurately described as a conceptual theatre piece by Peter Greenaway and Saskia Boddeke, with background music by Andriessen. The score was a strong one—Andriessen mixed his characteristic big-band ostinatos with fragile, Feldmanesque nocturnes—but it was muffled by crude amplification, chopped apart by deafening taped interludes, and literally drowned in special effects, which included a lot of water being dumped on the stage. "Writing to Vermeer" felt like a celebrity vehicle, and Andriessen, alas, was not the famous one. As with so many contemporary opera concepts, the composer became an afterthought in the marketing of a name from the world of literature, theatre, or film.

In a parallel series of programs, homage was paid to Messiaen, for whom an electronic timbre was just one of many exotic tone colors to be manipulated freely. If Messiaen had never encountered an ondes martenot, his music would still have sounded the same. That is one definition of what it means to be a composer: the instruments do not dictate the ideas, the medium is not the message. "From the Canyons to the Stars," which the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center played at Avery Fisher Hall, deploys conventional instruments in wildly unconventional combinations, and, for good measure, throws in a wind machine, the most antiquated of noisemaking devices. The piece almost seems to have an anti-electronic agenda: otherworldly timbres are made with old-world means. It also leans heavily on plain triads—in defiance of the ban on tonality propagated by Messiaen's pupil Pierre Boulez. The concluding blaze of A major sounds like the emancipation of the consonance.

I have heard three remarkable performances of "Canyons" in the last six years, all of them led by de Leeuw, and I wish I could have heard more. A feast of natural sound in natural space, this work summons acoustical wonders that high-tech spectacles cannot rival. Busoni's prophecy of an electronic musical universe came true long ago: most public arenas are wired for sound, and most of what we hear is a digital mirage. Messiaen's music—like Bach's, like Schubert's—is a liberation from the liberation. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

LOVE CHILDREN

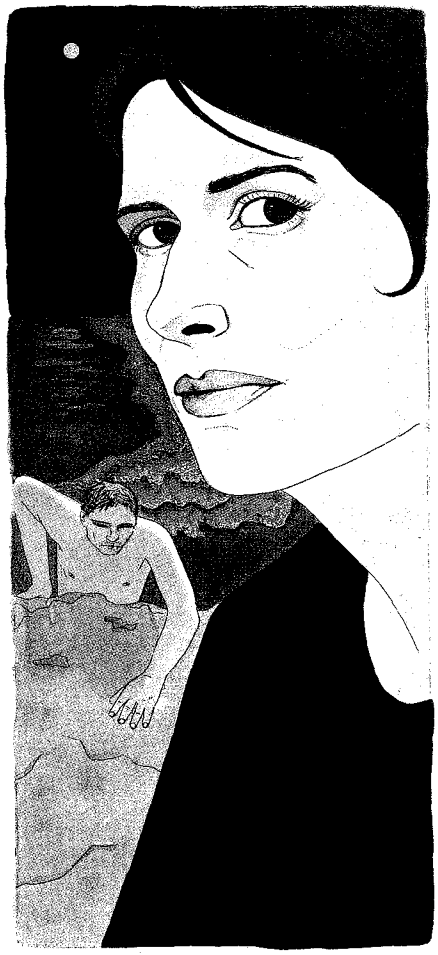
Lonely hearts and hunters in modern-day France and England.

BY ANTHONY LANE

Is Juliette Binoche an actress for our times? Whenever I see her she seems to have been summoned from an ever more distant age. With her neat black bob, she used to remind me of a nineteen-twenties flapper; then I decided that she was the perfect Tolstoy heroine, with her frightening flurries of mood and the hot spots of color that would bloom on her ice-white cheeks; now, in "Alice and Martin," there is so much pain beneath the porcelain that she looks practically medieval. It's a modern-day movie, but, for all her shift dresses and clicking heels, Binoche plays the eponymous Alice as a kind of spectral visitor, residing here only on sufferance; when Martin (Alexis Loret) declares that he wants her, Alice's gaze drops down and away, as if he had confirmed a dismaying rumor or broken terrible news.

Despite this unpromising start, the two of them become lovers, although they hardly follow the conventional contours of a love story. We begin with Martin as a boy of ten, cared for by his mother (Carmen Maura). She announces that, for the first time, he is to live with his father, the terrifying Victor (Pierre Maguelon)—a bull of a man, shorn of all sentiment, who runs his home like a barracks. Victor has a wife (Martin's mother was one of many passing fancies), who bore him three other sons. The next few scenes shiver past like a fever; I could swear that we were steeped in a summer afternoon, but then Martin flings open his shutters to find snow cascading under moonlight. Up comes the title "Ten years later," and Martin, now an adult, is seen hurtling through a garden, as if fleeing the scene of a crime. He rifles through trash beside a factory, wades through a cornfield so bright it hurts your eyes, and takes shelter in a gloomy hut on the flank of a deep valley. The switch from boy to man, from cold to heat, from night to day, and from town to country is so blinding and breakneck that it verges on the psychotic. What the hell is going on here?

Martin is flaking apart. But André Téchiné's film, too, is playing hard to get; like many of his fellow-directors in France, Téchiné seldom misses a chance to draft his films, whatever their notional subject, as encrypted mysteries. I suspect, for instance, that those ten years—the lost decade of Martin's adolescence, none of which we see—were the crux of his existence, and that the movie is no more than an appendage to the real story. The appearance of Alice is equally oblique; she is suddenly there, unmentioned and unheralded, playing a violin. She turns out to be the roommate of Benjamin (Mathieu Amalric), Martin's half brother, with whom he has come to crash in Paris. Benjamin is the one unfrozen person in this picture: gay, effusive, proud enough to stand up to his father, and happy to turn tricks in small hotels. "Alice and I have found a certain balance," he explains. "We take turns at being each other's child."



Juliette Binoche in "Alice and Martin."

LARA TOMLIN

These tilting, off-center relationships—pretending to be a friend's child, finding yourself infantilized afresh, loving your brother both more and less than he would like—are a Téchiné specialty. The sibling rivalry of Catherine Deneuve and Daniel Auteuil in "Ma Saison Préférée" gave me the creeps, and I wasn't surprised to hear Alice's soliloquy on the death of her sister Odile at the age of eleven: "Everyone treated her as an adult. . . . She had no childhood." This new film strengthens our vision of early life as an arena for the staging of discontent, yet also as a place that we abandon at infinite cost, and that some of us cannot quit at all; when Alice and Martin get it together and she becomes pregnant, it's hard to know who should be looking after whom. As Martin, Alexis Loret is a bit of a blank; he winds up modelling for Armani, which seems about right, and awakens only at the bitter end, after he has delivered himself into the hands of the law—to be punished, like the gaunt hero of a Gide novel or a Bresson film, for a sin that no one else had noticed, and whose gravity weighs on him alone. The whole movie, in fact, is full of people fighting to restart their lives, or to start them properly for the first time: "We need to find the courage to be happy," says Alice, who somehow makes room for one of those filthy, Chaucerian laughs that are such a shocking item in the Binoche repertoire. The final shot, as quick and quiet as a knife, shows her venturing a half smile. Whether "Alice and Martin" makes psychological sense I cannot begin to say, but I was convinced by the tenacious, tough-skinned lyricism of its look; wait for the fractured glimpse of *la France profonde*, all river and mist, caught from a passing car, or for the dazzling shot of a nighttime sea, where the waves curdle into slow motion, pause, and then break back into real time. No one, not even the French, can put the world on hold forever.

The new Michael Winterbottom film, "Wonderland," is about three sisters—their hopes and fears, the useless men who mill around them, and the faint possibility that their lives might yet not be blighted. In other words, welcome to Chekhov country; the scene has shifted westward to London, and the movie is set just the other side of the millennium, but the air of doleful wastage and, now and then, of mishap recycled as comedy bears a true Chekhovian tint. The sisters are Nadia (Gina McKee), who works in a café and arranges dates through the lonely-hearts columns; Molly (Molly Parker), who is carrying her first child, along with the added burden of a panicky husband; and Debbie (Shirley Henderson), a hairdresser with a nasty ex, a sweet-faced nine-year-old son, and a bad case of split ends where her morality should be.

Stretching over three days, the movie nips and darts between the sisters, reaching further still to touch on those whom they love, those whom they most definitely do not love, and, in a couple of cases, those who can look forward to loving them. I tried not to laugh at the girls' parents, Bill (Jack Shepherd) and Eileen (Kika Markham), whose mutual loathing is so automatic that it sounds like a Monty Python sketch; given the choice, I would prefer the company of Franklyn (David Fahm), a black guy who keeps seeing Nadia at the café but lacks the nerve to engage her in conversation. He seethes in solitude until the final scene of the film, which offers a chance introduction in the street. Needless to say, he all but blows it by tripping over a pothole in front of her eyes. The London of this picture is resolutely uncool: frantic, low on cash, and foully clouded. Night buses rock through rainstorms, their windows misting up with all the breath inside; anyone with a tea-based notion of the old country will be alarmed to see it engulfed in booze and cigarettes.

American audiences, however, should count themselves lucky: they tend to get only the respectable British movies, like this one, whereas in London viewers have been treated over the past two years to a conveyor belt of sludge—unspeakable gangster flicks, for the most part, that cannot conceivably be of interest to anyone but the immediate families of the leading actors. It is only directors like Michael Winterbottom, in fact, who stop me from calling for an unconditional moratorium on British cinema. "Wonderland" is weaker than some of his other work, like "Jude" or "Welcome to Sarajevo"; for all the salty grain of its images, the new film seems light and inconsequential by comparison, and there are times, amid the rich variety of aimlessness, when one can't quite follow who's not doing what. But, as always, Winterbottom makes a fierce bid to grip the texture of his settings and to rub his characters the wrong way; none of them amount to much, but you're oddly desperate to know what befalls them, and you feel branded by the sight of Debbie's son, Jack (Peter Marfleet), strolling under a sky of fireworks, his face a perfect compound of hope and no hope. All of which makes you ask where the prolific Winterbottom, fresh from his three sisters, will head next. Even now, he is probably scouting for cherry orchards in the South Bronx. ♦

The New Yorker (ISSN 0028-792X), published weekly (except for six combined issues: Feb. 21 & Feb. 28, Apr. 24 & May 1, June 19 & 26, Aug. 21 & 28, Oct. 16 & 23, Dec. 25 & Jan. 1) by The Condé Nast Publications Inc., 4 Times Square, N.Y., N.Y. 10036. Vol. LXXVI, No. 21, July 31, 2000. Periodical postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. Authorized as second-class mail by the Post Office Department, Ottawa, Canada, and for payment of postage in cash. Canadian Publication Mail Sales Product Agreement No. 190969. Canadian goods-and-services-tax registration number R123242885. Registered as a newspaper at the British Post Office. Subscription rates: In U.S. and possessions, one year, $49.95. In Canada, one year, $90.00 (includes GST and HST where applicable). In Germany, one year, DM290. Mail orders to: IP Internationale Presse, Distribution & Marketing GmbH, Waldstr. 70, D-63128 Dietzenbach, Germany. Other foreign subscriptions, one year, $112.00, payable in advance.

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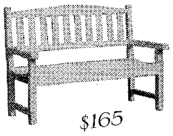

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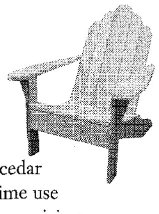

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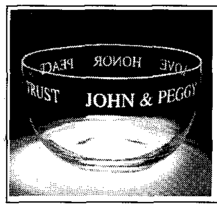

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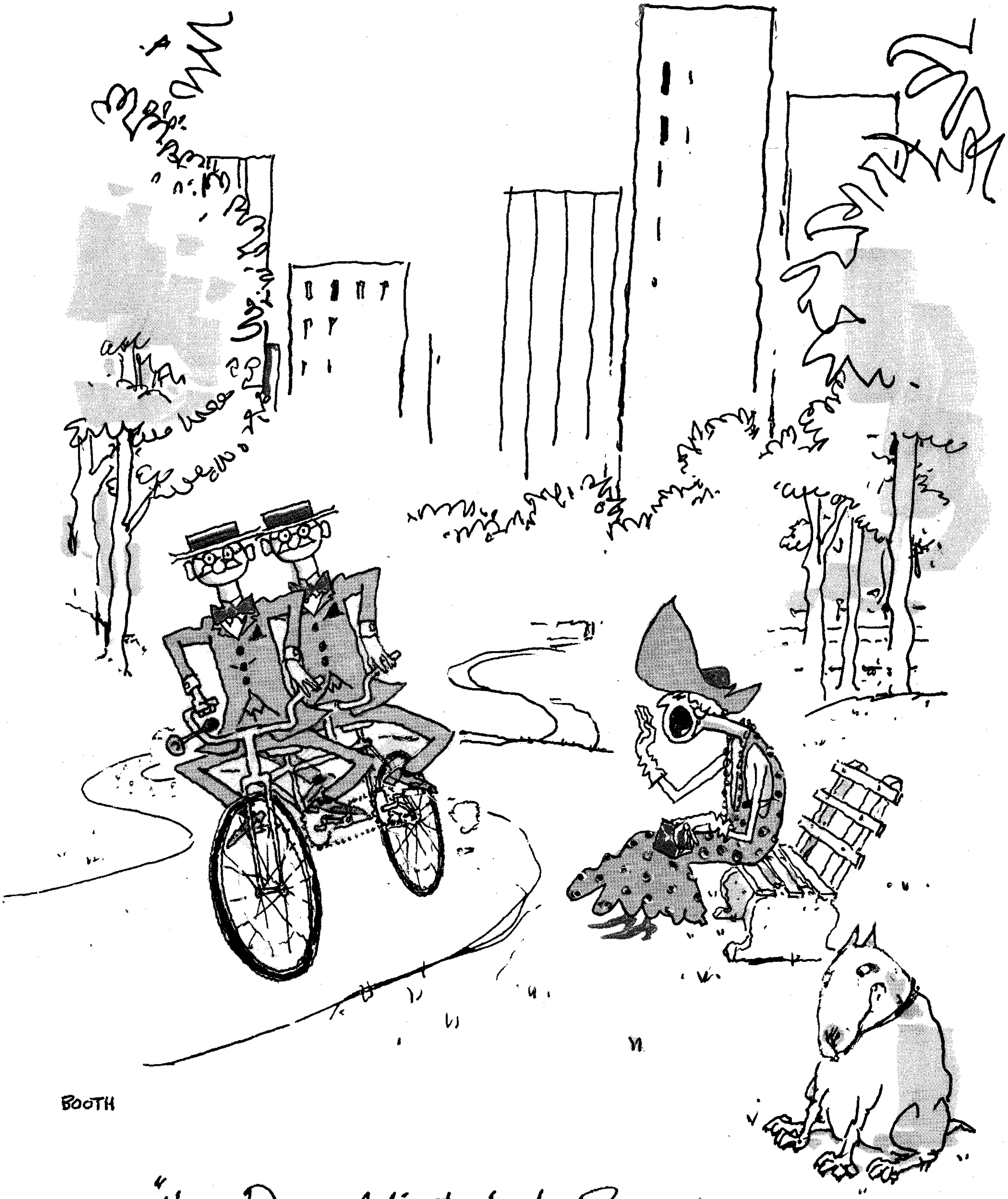
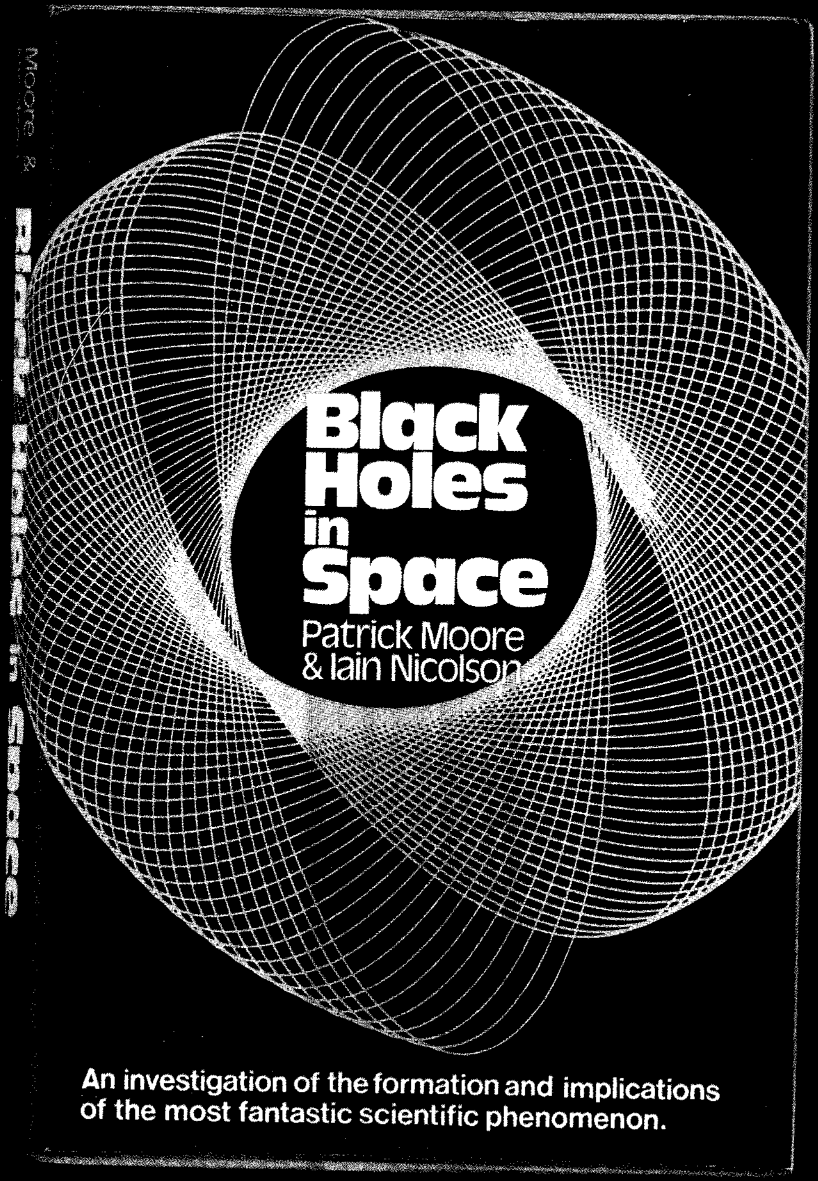


"Hey, Dinwiddie twins! Remember me? Drusilla Settle from fourth-period geometry!"

July 1, 1980. Sucked from shelf, enters parallel dimension or something.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